Saturday Afternoon at the *Mill*

and other one-act plays

SATURDAY AFTERNOON
AT THE MILL
AND OTHER ONE-ACT PLAYS

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China Youth Art Theatre's Production

SATURDAY AFTERNOON AT THE MILL

TSUI TEH-CHIH

CHARACTERS

(*in order of appearance*)

Wang Chuan, *a girl of 18, spinner*
Liu Lien-ying, *a girl of 23, spinner*
Chang Teh-yu, *a man of 25, a team leader in A Shift*
Old Chao, *a man of 30, a team leader in C Shift*
Foreman Fu, *a man of 40, spinning shop foreman in A Shift*

TIME

Autumn, 1954

The action takes place in a bed-sitting room in the women's hostel of a textile mill in north-east China. On the wall facing the audience is a door and a big window (right), through which the audience can see the mill roof. The two girls' beds, neat and tidy, with clean quilts, are on either side of the door. There is a table and a chair in one corner of the room. The table top has on it a thermos flask, a mirror, combs and sundry toilet articles. On one wall is a large poster of two children holding doves, with the words *We Love Peace* underneath. Bright-coloured coats and dresses hang in a row along another wall.

The morning shift is over. It is Saturday. Wang Chuan is sitting in front of the mirror doing her hair.

Wang Chuan has only been to primary school. She came to work in the mill because her sister has been a worker there for years. She is a straightforward,

warm-hearted girl and an energetic worker. Like most young girls of her age she is either up or down emotionally. She laughs easily, but the tears come as easily. She likes to take trouble with her appearance. Since she joined the Youth League a year ago, she has come on a lot, with the help of her roommate, Liu Lien-ying.

Wang (*looks at her watch, and says aloud*): It's Saturday, why hasn't she come back? (*Picks up some knitting wool which is lying on the table.*) I'll just put this on her bed. I'm sure she'll knit it up for him. (*Puts the wool down and returns to the mirror. She finishes doing her hair, gets a jacket down from the hanger and changes the one she has on.*)

(*Liu Lien-ying comes in. She is a good-looking girl, with big dark eyes, a nicely shaped nose and pretty, dimpled cheeks. She wears her hair short and is simply dressed. She is country-born, lost her father when she was small and has been working as a mill-hand since she was twelve, supporting her younger sister and brothers with her wages. Years of living on her own, without a family to care for her, has matured her, and turned her into an adult, considerate person. She has come on a lot since she joined the Communist Party and is now leader of the spinning shop Party group. She is well balanced, sticks to principles, lives up to her ideals and is always ready to make herself better. She is devoted to the Party and never spares herself either at work or in studying.*)

Wang (*looking up as Liu Lien-ying comes in*): Why ever are you so late today, Lien-ying?

Liu: I've been to see Hsiao-yu off — you know, the one from C Shift.

Wang: Where's she gone? Why did you have to see her off?

Liu: She's gone to study at the Party school. (*Wistfully.*) It must be wonderful to get such a chance to study. (*Accusingly.*) You should have gone to see her off too! Everyone was there, including your sister.

Wang: Well, she was in the same shift as my sister. I hardly know her at all. Why should I go to see her off? I'm going to the pictures tonight.

Liu: You've no mind for anything on Saturday, have you, my child? The moment the shift's over, you dash back here to preen yourself in front of the mirror.

Wang: I like that! I was waiting and waiting for you, but you were ages coming. (*Points to the bed.*) What d'you think of that?

Liu (*walks over to the bed and picks up the wool*): What's this? Where did it come from?

Wang: Our team leader brought it round a few moments ago. It's getting colder now and he wants a pull-over.

Liu (*rather shyly*): Why give it to me? Can't you knit it for him?

Wang: Because it wasn't me he asked! Why should I knit for him? Come on now, don't tell me you mind knitting him a pull-over.

Liu: No, I don't mean I mind that, but you see, I've never knitted anything for a man before. I wouldn't know how to do it. I'll have to get bigger needles, I suppose. (*She strokes the wool and puts it down on the folded quilts.*) Did he say whether he's coming in again?

Wang: Oh, he's sure to be coming. He's gone to the Emulation Committee meeting.

Liu: Dear me, yes! It's getting to the end of the month again.

Wang: Tell me, Lien-ying, do you think our team'll get the red banner again this month?

Liu: How would I know? The results aren't out yet.

Wang: You can make a good guess! I think we've got a good chance of doing it again. This month Chang Teh-yu's really stirred us all up and made

us fairly bubble over with enthusiasm. Not one of us let the yarn split this month, and we've over-fulfilled our quota again—even more than we did last month. That red banner won't slip out of our hands, I'm sure! (*Hopefully.*) You know, if we keep it this month we'll be the mill's model team. Hooray!

Liu: Oh you silly girl! Nothing's certain yet and you're daft with joy already.

Wang: Daft with joy? Don't try to tell me you're not even more pleased! This time *he* will be the leader of the model team. Remember what a mess our team was at the beginning of the year? Month after month we couldn't even fulfil our quota. In my opinion it's thanks to him that we are doing so well now. He's a good chap in every way. (*Pointedly.*) I must say, Lien-ying, you do know how to pick a good man. I don't think you'd find his match anywhere in the mill.

Liu (*bashful at being teased, stops her*): All right! Don't go on praising him to me. Anyway, I don't agree that he's so very wonderful. If our team does do well it's really because we try to carry out Party decisions properly.

Wang: Sure, sure. Only I know someone who's secretly glad at heart, don't I? Confess you know who I mean! (*With great enthusiasm.*) I say, why don't you two go to the pictures tonight?

Liu: What d'you mean, you two?

Wang: You and our team leader, of course!

Liu: Why should I go to the pictures with him? I haven't the time.

Wang: Oh? Have you got to go to a meeting or something?

Liu: There's the group's plan to be done. . . .

Wang (*disappointed*): Really, Lien-ying, I think you're terrible! Why are you always like this? You've been friendly with him for ages and look at you, still behaving as if there's nothing special

between you. And when you do see him you either talk about "ideological problems" or the mill, even on Saturday night. You never go out together to have fun. Tell me, how are you two getting along, anyway?

Liu: How? In the usual way, I suppose!

Wang: Go on! Don't try to hide what you really feel. You've been all in a fret about him for a long time. I really think you worry about him more than you do about yourself. Look at the time he had that bit of trouble at work — you were tossing and turning all night! You hardly slept a wink. And if he skips a meal occasionally, you grumble about it, and worry. In the usual way! Why, you've even written to your mother about him, haven't you? You see, I know all about it!

Liu (*very much embarrassed*): Stop it, you silly! Think you're so clever, don't you? I can't keep a thing from you.

Wang: And why should you? Now look, it's been quite some time since you came out of hospital, and you've been finding out all about one another all that time. There's no question that he's terribly sweet on you. He's always helping you plan this and do that. And when you criticize him over anything, he accepts your opinion at once. D'you remember you once said that the tall chap went off for a smoke too often, and wasted working time? Well, Chang Teh-yu promptly cut out smoking! Why d'you think he wants you to knit him a pull-over? You must know what he feels about you? What are you waiting for? I think it's about time you showed him you've got some feelings too. (*Like a child.*) If you go on being so stand-offish about it, though, don't expect me to be sympathetic. Next time you want to find out something about him I shan't tell you a thing.

Liu: All right, all right. Run along now, and go about your own business.

Wang (*still sticking to the subject*): Well, are you going to the pictures tonight or not?

Liu: Have you booked tickets yet?

Wang: Yes, and I'm going round to Young Hu right now to pick them up. Shall I buy two for you?

Liu: No! (*Then, very much embarrassed.*) Well, to tell you the truth, I have booked two tickets myself. Will you bring them back for me when you get yours?

Wang (*surprised*): Oho! So you've booked tickets already, eh?

Liu (*shyly*): You see, everyone was booking tickets, so I thought I might as well get a couple too.

Wang (*beginning to understand*): I see. So that's how it is, eh? You kept it dark this time, all right!

Liu (*cautiously*): Now listen, Wang Chuan, don't go gossiping round about this, please! We've never been out together all this time. It's quite possible that he won't want to go, or something, and I'll be so embarrassed if. . . .

Wang: Ah, don't be such a fusser. He won't be unwilling to go, you see! Haven't I seen him come here every Saturday? Doesn't he always hang around patiently, and listen to you talking about work, and then go off so forlornly? I'll guarantee he'll be only too eager to go. Anyway, I'm off now to get your tickets. (*Prepares to go.*)

Liu (*calling her back*): Wang Chuan!

(*Wang Chuan returns.*)

Liu (*earnestly*): Don't just egg us on like this! You should tell me seriously what you think about it. Do you think we're going the right way about it?

Wang: Goodness, yes! You've been so careful about everything you do. There can't be anything incorrect. You're not at all like some of the others! Look at Little Chen — she and her boy friend went

to a few dances, then they bought a watch and settled their life together, bang! But you've been so cautious! Neither of you have bothered about silly little things. You've worried about real things like your work, and the way you think about things. And you've both improved so much these last six months. You won't find another couple with a better understanding of one another in the whole mill. If you want to know what I think, I don't think you should have dragged out this getting to know one another period so long. You've been too brutal to yourself, and choked it all back.

Liu (*very seriously*): But Wang Chuan, you know, that isn't really choking back feelings. We've talked about it before, haven't we? You have to be very careful about these things. Look what happens to so many of our girls. They go and get married before they each know what the other thinks about the real things of life, and then of course, after they've married, they fall behind in work and aren't even happy at home. You yourself just mentioned Little Chen. She is an example of this. How can there be a good end for marriages like that? We all want to make ourselves better, so we must find a partner who can help us, and whom we can help. We must be careful about it. Don't you forget, either: you'll have to do it too some day.

Wang (*bashfully*): Me? Why drag me into this. . . . It'll be years before I. . . .

Liu: Maybe, but when it happens you'll have to treat it seriously. Getting married is a lifelong affair.

Wang: M'm, yes. But you've picked yourself a fine chap, anyhow. And I should say you both have taken enough time to find out about each other. You shouldn't go on holding yourself aloof any longer. After all, time's passing, and your mum's always asking about it in her letters. I think you

should hurry up a bit. In fact, if things go well, there's nothing to stop you getting married.

Liu (*bashfully*): Married indeed! Who's been talking about getting married? Today'll be the first time we've ever gone out together. We've not even mentioned marriage to one another yet! I don't even know whether he cares. . . .

Wang: What, with you? You're pretty, and you can help him in his work! Of course he cares! I don't think you realize how anxious he must be. Tonight, when you're coming back from the pictures, you must bare your heart . . . and everything'll be settled.

Liu (*embarrassed*): Oh dear! Bare my heart? I shan't know what to say! Anyhow, you'd better go and get the tickets.

Wang: I'm going. But he'll be here soon. Hurry up and make yourself pretty for him. (*Goes to the door.*)

Liu (*anxiously*): If Young Hu were to ask you who I want the second ticket for, don't you say anything.

Wang: Don't worry! (*Exit.*)

(*Liu Lien-ying opens her suitcase, brings out a pretty jacket and starts to change. A pause. Wang Chuan rushes in.*)

Wang (*in a whisper*): Hey, he's coming, he's coming. . . .

Liu (*starts, but immediately calms down*): What's there to get excited about? If he's coming, well, I can't stop it.

Wang: Don't pretend to be so shy with me! Listen, don't put on your serious face and just talk shop this time, please. Have a proper talk, eh?

Liu (*shyly*): Leave me alone! Run along, now, do.

Wang (*remembers something as she turns to go*): You can ask him what our chances are of getting the red banner this month.

Liu: You always set your heart on nice easy things.

Wang: No, I really want to know, and he'll be fresh from the meeting where they have been discussing this very thing, so he must have a pretty good idea. You will ask, won't you? (*Exit.*)

(*Liu Lien-ying finishes getting ready quickly, has a last look in the mirror and sits down on the bed with assumed carelessness.*)

Wang (*offstage*): Here he is!

(*A pause. There is a knock at the door.*)

Liu: Come in.

(*Chang Teh-yu enters. He is a strong, healthy young man who has proved to be a very capable team leader. While he is hard-working and enthusiastic, he tends to be a little impatient and hasty. He has been in the Communist Party for three years. His whole life is centred on the team he leads, and he devotes all his time and energies to it and finds his greatest pleasure in its successes. Now he has come straight from the workshop and hasn't changed his clothes. Cotton fluff is still clinging to his jacket and trousers.*)

Chang (*goes over to Liu Lien-ying*): Oh, here you are!

Liu (*standing up composedly*): Hello, there!

Chang: I've got a letter for you. (*Hands her the letter.*)

Liu (*looks at the envelope, puts it down*): It's from my mum. (*Pointing to the chair.*) Aren't you going to sit down?

Chang: Thank you. (*Sits on the chair.*) I've been here earlier this evening. Did you know?

Liu: Yes, Wang Chuan told me. I went to see Hsiao-yu off. (*Pointing to the wool.*) You brought this, didn't you?

Chang: Well, yes. You see, since I gave up smoking, I've saved a bit, so I bought some wool. But everyone seems to be so busy, and I don't like to be a bother. Do you happen to have time?

Liu: Yes, only I've never made a man's pull-over before. I don't know what sort of a job I'll make of it.

Chang: I don't mind what it's like as long as it'll keep me warm.

(*Silence.*)

Liu: You've just come from the Emulation Committee meeting, haven't you? What's the latest position?

Chang (*unable to hide his pleasure*): I was just going to tell you. This time our team's sure to be on top again. We're leading on points now, and if we can keep it up a few more days we'll get the red banner again. (*Very much excited.*) That'll be the sixth month running, so it means in a few days we'll be the model team of the whole mill.

Liu (*delighted*): Fine, fine! Wang Chuan will be ever so pleased . . . she told me to ask you about it just now. She's put in a lot herself, to get the red banner.

Chang: Yes. She's become one of our best hands. She's quick at changing the bobbins and good at mending broken ends. . . . (*With satisfaction.*) D'you remember how she used to cry in front of her spinning frame, when she first came, because she couldn't mend the broken ends? We've brought her on a long way.

Liu: How are the other teams doing?

Chang: We don't have to worry about them, except for C Shift's No. 2 team. They're catching up very fast this month, only two points behind us. It's a pity they're such tricky customers. They're always leaving us bad bottom formations when they go off shift. . . .

Liu: But they shouldn't do that. It'll affect production all round. We'll have to do something to stop such tricky dealings.

Chang: They won't get away with it, though. With their Hsiao-yu gone they'll not have anyone who's

strong at the bobbins. If we can make our frame 12 behave, and see that it doesn't produce substandard stuff, we'll leave them gaping at the end of the month.

Liu (*meditatively*): It's so easy to get into a muddle during emulation campaigns. We'll have to be very careful. . . . (*Suddenly catches herself talking shop again, quickly changes the subject.*) You . . . er . . . why haven't you got out of your working clothes yet?

Chang (*looks down at himself and says in an embarrassed tone*): We had a meeting right after work and I seem to have forgotten all about it. . . .

Liu: You're working too hard. Sometimes you even forget to eat properly, I understand. . . .

Chang: Not now! I always remember to eat a good meal since that time when you criticized me for forgetting. Honestly, I've given it a lot of attention, and I haven't skipped a single meal since then.

Liu: Good. You must look after your health, you know.

Chang: You are quite right. . . . (*An awkward pause ensues. Chang is longing to bring the conversation to where he wants it but does not know how to do it. Coughs and continues.*) Look, haven't we got a problem to discuss?

Liu (*can't imagine what he's trying to say*): A problem? What problem d'you mean?

Chang (*bursting to talk about his feelings for her but flustered by this question*): Can't we do what we did last Saturday? We went over the week's work and. . . .

Liu: There's only the problem of what to do to help Liu Sheng left, and as far as problems go, that's too thorny a question to tackle in a few minutes. Let's not bother about it today. Ever since the emulation campaign started you've been working yourself to death. What you need is a good rest.

Chang (*thinks that he is being dismissed and tries desperately to prolong his visit*): No, no, I'm not the least bit tired. I'm used to it. I like going over our work on Saturday evenings.

Liu (*with concern*): But you shouldn't go on doing it, though. You haven't had a decent rest for weeks now. Being busy all the time will get anybody down. The strongest person can't stand it.

Chang (*looking at her bright jacket and feeling his way*): But you're all dressed up! Were you going somewhere?

Liu (*suddenly overcome by shyness, mumbles*): Oh no — I mean . . . I don't know that I'm going anywhere.

Chang (*losing hope again*): Ah well, I suppose I'd better go back to the hostel and have a good sleep. (*Turns to go.*)

Liu (*awkwardly*): They say this week's film is very good. Aren't you going to see it?

Chang: I'd like to, but you know it's no fun going to the pictures by yourself. (*Glances hopefully at Liu Lien-ying.*)

(*Liu Lien-ying starts to say something, loses courage and just stares at the floor.*)

Chang: Oh well, better be going, I suppose. (*Again goes towards the door.*)

(*Liu, gathering courage, cries out and stops him. Old Chao rushes in. He is a skilled worker with plenty of experience, who has been working in the mill for twenty years or so. He used to be the leader of Chang's team. He does a thorough job on the whole but lacks drive. He is an expert on his job but clings rather to old methods. He is now the leader of C Shift's No. 2 team, the one which is racing closest to Chang's team. Like Chang, he is completely engrossed in the campaign.*)

Old Chao (*shouting as he appears*): Is Foreman Fu here?

Chang (*crossly*): No! Why ever should you expect to find him in the women's hostel?

Old Chao: I've got to see him urgently, and I've looked all over the place. I thought he might be here talking over the work with you.

Liu (*immediately interested*): What's your urgent business?

Old Chao: You know our Hsiao-yu's gone; we haven't got a replacement for her yet. That means we're one short on the bobbins.

Chang: I say! D'you mean to say they haven't given you anyone yet?

Liu: Didn't the manager arrange for her to be replaced before she went?

Old Chao: 'Fraid not. She went off at such short notice, you see. But the manager's just told me he'll talk it over with your foreman and get someone transferred.

Chang: What? From our shift?

Old Chao: That's what he said. I don't know how good she'll be, either. It's too bad to lose a model worker at this point of the campaign! (*Goes towards the door.*) I must find the foreman.

(*He prepares to go, but just then Foreman Fu comes in. He is a technician from pre-liberation days, is enthusiastic about work and willing to listen to other people's views, but is over-cautious. He doesn't dare answer the leadership back, nor like to offend the workers, so he tends rather to give in to everyone and please nobody in the end.*)

Old Chao (*goes straight up to the foreman*): There you are, Old Fu! I've been looking everywhere for you. Now, who are you going to give us for the bobbins? We want someone good, you know.

Foreman Fu (*quickly assenting*): Yes, yes, the manager told me. That's what I've come here about.

Old Chao: Get a move on, won't you? We need someone tonight and the quota's very much on my mind.

Foreman Fu (*looking pained*): You know how it is. It's not so easy to arrange a transfer. (*Gives Chao a look and then says soothingly.*) You know I'll do my best to settle it as quickly as I can. You go back and wait.

Old Chao: I'll leave it to you then. I'm on the night shift, but I haven't been to bed today. You'll make it snappy, won't you?

Foreman Fu (*nodding*): Yes, yes!

(*Exit Old Chao.*)

Foreman Fu (*to Chang and Liu*): Well, you both heard him. Now, let's study the question and see what's to be done.

Chang: Which team are you going to rob?

Liu (*to Chang*): Looks as if he's after us.

Foreman Fu: That's it. That's why I'm here, in fact. We'll have to take someone from your team this time.

Chang: Why pick on us? We haven't got anyone to spare!

Foreman Fu: Your Liu Sheng's back from sick ward, isn't she? You've got more people than any other team.

Chang (*disgruntled*): It's too bad to take someone from us right in the thick of the emulation campaign. Our record'll drop straight down.

Liu: Never mind. We have got one too many in the team; it'll make us the right number if we give them one.

Foreman Fu (*trying to talk them round*): I'm afraid it can't be helped. You see, this is an unexpected difficulty. They've lost Hsiao-yu and the manager insists that someone's got to be transferred from our shift. It's up to all of us to do our best to overcome such difficulties.

Chang (*unwillingly*): I suppose so, but why should we be the ones? Just when we are doing well for a change! If you go on doing such things you won't like it a bit at the end of the month.

Foreman Fu: They're really desperate. Now, who do you think should be transferred?

Chang: Bother it, we only just know about it. We can't decide at once. The least you can do is let us talk it over.

Liu: Well, we shan't forget we've got to replace a very good worker. And we won't deal with the matter lightly. We'll talk it over and let you know.

Foreman Fu: Good. I'll go back to the shop then, and wait for your decision. Let me know as soon as you can, won't you? (*Goes to the door.*)

Chang (*remembering something, calls him back*): I say, what about our No. 12 spinning frame? It's always producing sub-standard stuff. Can't you do something about it?

Foreman Fu: It's difficult. They've gone over the machine and there's nothing basically wrong. You'll just have to handle it better. For the time being you'll have to solve the problem as best as you can yourself.

Chang: *We* will have to solve the problem! You always say that when there's trouble. It's been a nuisance for days and days now. We have to put someone to stand over it all the time and keep an eye on it. It's a full-time job for one of our people. How long d'you expect us to put up with it?

Foreman Fu: It'll take a lot of head-scratching before we've solved it. Meanwhile you must think of something yourself. If I find a solution I'll let you know. (*Exit.*)

Liu (*to Chang*): Oh well, let's get down to business, and settle it quickly so that we can get away.

Chang: It's a damned nuisance! It wouldn't have mattered so much at any other time, but they would

want to transfer someone from our team just when the others are getting so close to our record.

Liu: Well, I don't think they like it any more than we do. How can they do a good job when they're one short? They must be terribly worried.

Chang: That's all very well, but the fact remains that it's awfully difficult for us. It's not as if we are having an easy time. We've got that wretched No. 12 to bother with. Any moment, if we take our eyes off it, there'll be a load of sub-standard stuff. That'll just about finish us off.

Liu: Losing one person won't make all that difference. Who've you got in mind?

Chang: It's really a hard thing to decide. (*Troubled.*) The campaign's at its height. We just *can't* spare any of our people. I don't see how I can decide who could be transferred.

Liu (*after some thought*): I've thought of someone who'll be just right, but I'd like to know your opinion.

Chang: Who?

Liu: Wang Chuan. She's just about right.

Chang (*taken aback*): What? You suggest we give them Wang Chuan?

Liu: Yes. She's quick at changing bobbins, she's good at helping her mates out, and she can more or less take the place of Hsiao-yu. Incidentally, her sister works in that shift too.

Chang (*much puzzled*): What ever's come over you? Wang Chuan is our main prop and we've spent months training her up! How can we let her go to the other team?

Liu: Well, who else is there? If we send someone who's not so good, it'll pull their work down and that'll never do.

Chang: That's all very well, but we can't let her go. Think again. What about our own quota? Haven't we got to fulfil that?

Liu: We've got a lot of experienced workers. We'll be able to find a way.

Chang: We haven't got a light task; how d'you propose to rearrange things?

Liu: Don't let's worry about that now. I'll guarantee there'll be some way to work it out.

Chang (*making a quick decision*): Never mind. I've thought of someone else.

Liu: There's no one I can think of except Wang Chuan. (*Suddenly realizes what he is getting at.*) Don't tell me you intend to give them someone we don't want, like the other shifts! That's a rotten thing to do.

Chang (*evasively*): No, no. I don't quite mean that.

Liu (*persisting*): Not everything's been done properly since the campaign started. We must do the right thing ourselves, when we're up against it.

Chang: There's a lot of bobbin changing in Old Chao's team and he's a strict leader, you know. I don't think Wang Chuan will want to go.

Liu: You don't have to worry about Wang Chuan's side of it. She's often said that it's inconvenient being on a different shift from her sister. I can promise you she'll accept the decision. What else have you got against it?

Chang (*stammers*): Er . . . nothing in particular. But the foreman will have to okay it before it can be finally decided. He may have something to say about it himself.

Liu: Go on! If we, as a team, agree that Wang Chuan should be transferred, there's nothing left for him to say! (*Decisively.*) We might just as well make up our minds now to let Wang Chuan go.

Chang: I don't agree. I want to talk it over with Old Fu first.

Liu: There's nothing to talk over, really. All you have to do is tell him our decision. (*Reminding him.*) This is Saturday evening! Go on and tell

him, and let's settle it, we've got other things to do. . . .

(*Wang Chuan comes on.*)

Liu: Ah good, here she is.

(*Chang Teh-yu, after thinking for a while, walks to the door.*)

Liu: When you've finished, be sure and come back. . . .

Chang: All right. (*Exit.*)

Wang: Where's he off to in such a hurry? Did you ask him if our team's going to get the red banner this month?

Liu (*glad to change the subject*): Yes, I did, but he can't say yet.

Wang: Oh well, we'll all know in a few days. (*Full of interest.*) Well? What did you talk about?

Liu: Nothing much. We were discussing work.

Wang (*very sweetly*): Pooh! You don't expect me to believe that!

Liu: But it's true. There's a new problem come up all of a sudden. I wanted to talk to you about it anyway.

Wang: Why, what's happened now?

Liu: Hsiao-yu's gone and C Shift's team is short of a bobbin changer. The foreman wants us to transfer someone from our team.

Wang (*promptly*): That's no problem at all! That Liu Sheng is always being an absentee for one reason or another. Let them have her.

Liu (*correcting her*): You shouldn't talk like that. Their team's working for our country as much as we are. We should give them a helping hand when they're in trouble, shouldn't we?

Wang (*feeling a little ashamed*): I was thinking about the campaign, you know. That team's nearly caught up with us.

Liu: We shouldn't encourage such thoughts at any time, you know; it's bad. (*Gently.*) We are thinking of sending you. What do you think?

Wang (*taken aback*): What? Me?

Liu: You're a member of the Youth League and a very skilled worker. You'll be able to do a good job there. What's more, you've often grumbled about the inconvenience of not being on the same shift as your sister. She's on C Shift, so you'll be working with her.

Wang (*very unwilling*): I'd rather my sister was moved to our shift. We work together so well here and I like it so much. Why should I want to go to another team?

Liu: Well, we weren't only considering your personal convenience, of course. The main thing is that they've got to have someone. They're naturally worried about their quota, too, and we've all got to think of what the work needs. . . .

Wang: I don't see why I should go! . . . (*Nearly in tears now.*) You and I have been roommates for over a year now, and I like it so much with you. I don't want to leave you.

Liu: That's nothing worth worrying about! You're not going far. We'll still be working in the same shop. We'll be seeing one another every day.

Wang: But it isn't the same thing at all. Here we're together off work as well. You're nicer to me than my sister, even, and you've helped me ever so much since I've been here.

Liu: Yes, but when the work needs us, we can't go round having personal preferences, you know. Besides, I shall be taking part in the Youth League activities, and we'll be in the same branch. We can still give one another a hand when we've got problems. Now's the time when we've got to think about the good of the work. . . .

Wang (*calmer now*): Well, has it been decided yet by the management?

Liu: I think so! Chang Teh-yu has gone to talk to the foreman, but I think it's as good as settled.

Wang: Oh well, if they've decided to transfer me, I shan't make a fuss.

Liu: Good girl! But tell me if you still feel bothered about it.

Wang: I shall miss you terribly. You won't forget me completely, will you?

Liu: Don't be a baby! Of course I shan't forget you.

Wang: That's all right, then. Anyway, it's quite true what you said: it's not as if I'm going far. When I want to see you I can always drop over after work.

Liu: Of course! So it's settled. When Chang Teh-yu comes to tell you, then, you'll go.

Wang: Sure! (*She is her usual cheerful self again. Brings out tickets.*) Here, I've brought you your cinema tickets.

(*Liu Lien-ying takes tickets but remains silent.*)

Wang: There's only an hour or so left before the film begins. You'd better be going directly he comes back.

Liu (*slowly*): I'm not sure we *are* going.

Wang (*puzzled*): What? Haven't you asked him to go?

Liu: No. You see, it's an awfully difficult thing to say.

Wang (*impatiently*): Slow-coach! You go so far as to buy the tickets but you're too bashful to say so!

Liu: Well, he didn't help. I don't think he wants to go.

Wang: What rot! Only a little while ago he was asking me whether you were doing anything in particular. It's your fault for always talking shop on Saturdays. He daren't mention anything else! (*Looks out of the window.*) Oh, oh, here he comes. This time I'll do the asking for you.

Liu (*very much embarrassed, quickly stops her*): No, no! Wang Chuan, let me do it myself.

(*Chang Teh-yu comes on.*)

Liu (*with great interest*): Well?

Chang: All settled. I've arranged it with the foreman.

Liu: So you told him we've decided to send Wang Chuan.

Chang (*purposely being vague*): I told him how things stood. He can transfer whoever he sees fit.

Liu (*light-heartedly*): Then everything's quite settled. (*To Wang.*) You might as well be prepared.

Wang: When am I supposed to go?

Chang: That sort of thing's up to the foreman. I don't really know the details myself.

Liu: I suppose it'll be either today or tomorrow.

Chang (*looking at his watch*): Ai, what a lot of time we've wasted. Why must they want to make transfers on a Saturday?

Liu: It's just one of those things, I suppose.

Wang (*to Chang, bluntly*): How do you feel about going to the pictures? Lien-ying wants you to go with her. Will you go?

Chang (*overjoyed*): Really?

Wang (*pointing to Liu*): Look at her, all dressed up and waiting for you.

Liu (*shyly*): Please, Wang Chuan! (*To Chang.*) Everyone has been saying the picture is awfully good, so I bought two tickets. Didn't you say just now that you're free?

Chang (*quickly*): Yes, yes, quite free. I wanted to ask you to go with me but I never thought you would want to go. (*Produces two tickets.*) See, I've bought two tickets myself.

Wang (*to Liu and Chang*): There you are! You both had it in mind. Why on earth didn't you say so? (*Chaffingly.*) You've got about an hour left. It's time you got started. Walk along slowly, and have

a bit of a gossip on the way. It'll just about be starting when you get there.

Liu (*still embarrassed*): Oh shut up, you silly girl!

Chang (*looking down at his clothes*): O dear, I've been rushing round ever since we finished work, and I haven't changed yet. I'll just dash back to the hostel and clean up.

Liu: There's no hurry, really. I'll start on and wait for you outside the gate.

Chang: Fine! I shan't be long.

(*Feeling happy, Liu Lien-ying and Chang Teh-yu go to the door. Foreman Fu rushes into the room.*)

Foreman Fu (*blocks Chang Teh-yu's way*): Chang, old man, that girl you suggested simply won't do.

Chang (*crossly*): Why ever didn't you go back to the shop, then? I'll come and talk about it later.

Foreman Fu: No, it can't wait. The manager wants us to settle this right now. I must ask you to talk it over now.

Chang: Oh me, what a nuisance!

Liu (*puzzled*): Why, what's happened?

Foreman Fu: It's this business of the transfer. (*To Chang.*) That girl you want to send just won't do. The whole shop knows that she's slow in changing bobbins, has more broken ends than anyone else and is always under the weather and asking for sick leave. We really can't send them someone like that.

Chang: You're exaggerating. She's not as bad as all that.

Liu (*more puzzled now*): Who are you talking about?

Foreman Fu: Who? Why, Liu Sheng, of course. (*To Chang.*) The manager agrees that we've got to go over this again. C Shift's got a hard enough time to do their stint in any case. We've got to give them a good worker, he says.

Wang: Oh, are you sending Liu Sheng after all?

Liu (*surprised, to Chang*): What *have* you done!

Foreman Fu (*quickly*): Why, are you surprised?

Liu: Uh . . . nothing. (*Checks herself. To the foreman.*) It's nothing. Go ahead with your discussion.

Foreman Fu (*to Chang*): You'll have to send someone else to C Shift. With Hsiao-yu gone they've only got green hands. The manager said we'll be affecting production if we behave like this with transfers.

Chang (*decisively*): Can't help that! I haven't anyone else I can spare. I'm not going to transfer anyone else.

Foreman Fu: How do you mean you haven't got anyone to spare! Your whole team, bar one, is made of model workers. All you've got to do is close your eyes and grab the first person you come across. Anyone would be better than the one you suggested. To send Liu Sheng is just ridiculous.

Chang: You seem to have set your heart on pulling us down. If a worker doesn't want to be transferred, I can't force her to. Anyone acting on compulsion simply won't put her heart into the job. Whose fault will that be, I should like to know?

(*Wang Chuan starts to say something but Liu Lien-ying speaks before her.*)

Liu: Stop a minute.

Foreman Fu: You can tell her how to look at it, can't you, and educate her? Anyway, something'll have to be done. (*Showing some spirit.*) I can tell you, Chang Teh-yu, you're taking a narrow, departmental view on this.

Chang (*very angry*): Who are you calling narrow? (*Vengefully.*) All right, don't ask me to deal with this transfer. Do it yourself, if you know so much about our team. Take your pick. If we haven't fulfilled our quota at the end of the month it'll be nothing to do with me.

Foreman Fu (*trying to ease the situation*): Climb down! Don't get mad. I'm only telling you what the manager said. You know I'm the foreman of

this shift. Don't you think I want my teams to do well? Of course I don't want to send a good worker out of our shift any more than you do. But the manager won't hear of the one you suggested. I told him myself we hadn't got anyone else to spare, but he didn't believe me.

Chang: Well then, you should have explained matters to him. He ought to know what the job's like nowadays; he's got no business to overlook our difficulties.

Foreman Fu: I tell you, he wouldn't listen. As a matter of fact, he told me off. (*Looking pained.*) Ai, I really don't know what to do. The poor old foreman gets it from both the higher-ups and the rank and file.

Chang: There're only a few more days till the end of the month. It'll be up to you whether our team does well or not. Think it over and do what you like.

Foreman Fu (*helplessly*): All right, I'll go and try talking to the manager again. (*Exit.*)

Liu (*hardly able to contain herself*): What ever's the matter with you? What made you change your mind about sending Wang Chuan?

Chang: I thought over carefully. She's not the right one to send.

Liu: But the foreman said someone like Liu Sheng won't do.

Chang: I can't help that. She's not so bad. In fact, she's better than some of their learners.

Liu: Better than some of their learners! Didn't you see the slipshod way she was working today? It was nothing but broken ends the moment she changed the bobbins. All the spinning frame girls were complaining. And the other team's got to work just as hard as we have. If they have her they'll have to put someone to keep an eye on her all the

time. We should be making their troubles worse instead of better.

Chang: If we can't send her, there's nobody else we can spare.

Liu: What do you mean? I thought we'd settled it already! We can do the best we can with our difficulties, and let Wang Chuan go.

Chang: I don't think Wang Chuan herself will want to go.

Liu: I've talked it over with her. She's not against it.

Wang: It's all right. Lien-ying told me just now. If the management tells me to go, I'll go.

Chang: That's all very well, but it'll affect our work.

Liu: Don't you believe me when I say we'll be able to work out some way to make up for it?

Chang: If Wang Chuan goes, everything's finished. There's nothing we can do about it.

Liu: Nothing we can do! Sun Shu-chih can take over Wang Chuan's job, and change the bobbins, and Liu Sheng can work at the frame.

Chang: Liu Sheng can't manage spinning frames any more than she can change bobbins. She's no good at anything.

Liu: Put her near me. I'll be responsible for seeing to her. It'll only be difficult for a little while. We've got a good team, and if we work together we'll be able to cope. Whatever happens it'll be easier for us than for them.

Chang (*decidedly*): No, I'm not going to let someone like Wang Chuan go.

Liu (*a little upset*): What ever's the matter with you?

Chang (*after a pause, seriously*): I'll be quite frank with you. This time I can't take your advice. There's only a difference of a fraction of a point between us, and I won't let a good worker like Wang Chuan go to them.

Liu (*taken aback*): You . . . but that's a terrible way of looking at it! How ever can you let such ideas enter your head?

Chang: This isn't an ordinary time. We're just at the most critical stage of the campaign and we've got to look at it all round.

Liu: But that's just what I want you to do. It's during such campaigns that we must think very carefully about these questions. There's enough bad spirit already in the shop. We ourselves must be very careful not to let the mill suffer as a whole.

Chang: All right, but why should I be the one who sacrifices? Nobody gives their favourite child to the monastery. I don't believe there's any leader who doesn't put his department's interests first when it's a question of transferring a worker.

Liu: Yes, but you know the Party secretary's been telling us that's the wrong way to look at it. We're Communists. We mustn't be dragged down into making ordinary mistakes. You must take the lead, and set a good example, so as to change this bad tendency.

Chang: Can't we do that next time? We've only just got our team into proper shape. This time we'll have to let it go.

Liu: If something's wrong, we shouldn't do it even once. Won't you go and tell the foreman you've changed your mind, and you'll let Wang Chuan go?

Chang: No, I can't bring myself to do it. We need people like her to make our team a success. I can't transfer our main prop.

Liu: What you mean is you won't!

Chang: All right. I won't.

Liu (*unable to restrain herself*): If you don't, I will. I'll go and say it for you.. (*Begins to go out.*)

Chang (*getting angry*): You'll wreck our team. What d'you think you'll get out of it?

Liu: I want to help you correct your mistakes. I can't stand by and watch you make a serious blunder.

Chang: I don't need your help. If that's what you call help, all I can say is it'll ruin me.

Liu: You'll understand later. . . . (*Starts towards the door again.*)

Chang (*shouting*): Lien-ying!

Liu: No, I'm really going. (*Continues towards the door.*)

Chang (*in a rage*): You're set on getting me down! All right, go ahead and do your worst. What do I care if I'm finished as a team leader!

Liu (*stops in her track*): What . . . what on earth are you saying?

Chang (*threateningly*): You're the leader of the Party group. You don't have to say more. I understand you now.

Liu (*angrily*): What makes you act like this?

Chang: I've nothing more to say. It's just that we think in different ways. If that's what you want, it's all right with me.

(*Liu Lien-ying pauses at the door. Foreman Fu comes in hurriedly.*)

Foreman Fu (*to Chang*): The manager wants to speak to you.

Chang: What about?

Foreman Fu: We've got to decide at once who's to be transferred. He wants to speak to you himself.

Chang: Good. (*Walks to the door. To Liu Lien-ying.*) Things are coming to a head. The fate of our team is in your hands. If you have a heart at all, think it over carefully. I've said all I can possibly say.

(*Chang Teh-yu and Foreman Fu go together.*)

Wang (*uneasily*): You know, you've really upset him.

Liu (*sighs*): It's dreadful to find him thinking so pettily.

Wang: Well, it's only natural, isn't it? He's worked so hard for the team, even to going without food and sleep for it. Why, he even trots to the washroom so as to save working time. It wasn't a bit easy getting the team into its present shape, and now he's afraid that we'll come right down. Of course it is hard for him to be reasonable about it.

Liu: But whether we come down is simply a question of whether we let it. It's entirely up to us. If we don't let it collapse, it won't. But it's not right at all for him to behave in the same petty way as the others. It'll only upset production in the whole mill.

Wang: Yes, but it's very common, and half the others are even worse. D'you remember when they had to transfer someone from C Shift's No. 1 team? They had a dreadful row with the foreman. And Chang's so stubborn he'd go on dashing down the same track until it's too dark to see his way. But this is a pity! The first time you two were going out together, and now you've got to have a quarrel over a thing like this.

Liu: But I can't stand by and let him push Liu Sheng into the other team, can I? Can I watch other people's work suffer?

Wang: D'you really think it will be so very bad for them? Liu Sheng's not all that much worse than some of the others in our shift.

Liu: What on earth do you mean? She's not worse than others in their team? Do you honestly think she can manage?

Wang: She'll manage more or less. One person doesn't make all that difference. What's more, it wasn't only you I didn't want to leave, it was Chang Teh-yu as well. He trained me from the time I came here knowing nothing, until I'm what I am today. I'd have missed him, too, if I was transferred. If I'm working with him I can go on learning more. Maybe it's just as well if I don't have to go. If we get the chance, can't we transfer my sister into our team?

(*Liu Lien-ying is deep in thought. Old Chao comes on.*)

Old Chao (*in a worried tone*): Isn't Foreman Fu here?

Wang (*coldly*): No!

Old Chao: Do you happen to know whether they've arranged the transfer yet?

Wang: Oh, don't keep asking me! Yes, they are transferring someone from our team.

Old Chao (*stunned*): What? From your team, eh?

Wang: Have you got to keep on worrying and nagging us about this, too?

Old Chao (*in despair*): Oh, what a mess this all is. All right, give us someone, good or bad. (*Desperately.*) Oh Heaven, why did Hsiao-yu have to go just now?

Liu (*cutting in*): Is it true that your lot can't cope with the quota?

Old Chao: Would I be grumbling like this if they could? With Hsiao-yu gone, it's as if half the team's gone. There're only a few learners left. (*Sighs.*) Ai! What's the use! What can I do now?

Liu (*decidedly*): You wait. (*Stands up and walks to the door with resolution.*)

Wang (*quickly*): Where are you going?

Liu: To the manager's office, to go into the question again.

Wang: Oh, don't, please! Why must you go and bring trouble on yourself?

Liu: I really can't stand by and do nothing when things are like this. (*Marches out.*)

Wang (*calling after her*): Lien-ying, Lien-ying! Don't do it!

(*Exit Liu Lien-ying.*)

Old Chao (*puzzled*): What's she going to do?

Wang (*tartly*): Do? She's going to see about the transfer for your team.

Old Chao: Don't pull my leg. Are such administrative affairs the business of the Party group leader?

Wang: Of course she's got to do something about it, when you're putting on all this act about not being able to cope, and being worried to death. I never heard such fussing and grumbling!

Old Chao: Can you blame me for grumbling? After all, there's only those few points' difference between us, and now we're dependent on your team for a transfer! You must see why I'm unhappy. Of course we're finished.

Wang: Don't you be too sure of your "of courses." I'd advise you to stop making foolish guesses.

Old Chao: Foolish guesses! It's simple logic and human nature. You don't even give way to your own father on the battlefield. Who's going to think about his competitors' benefit in an emulation campaign? (*Inquisitively.*) Tell me, who *are* you transferring to us?

Wang (*spitefully*): Me, me, I tell you.

Old Chao: Stop teasing, can't you? We wouldn't aspire to such an honour.

Wang: Oh, go away! When you're short of a hand, you come crawling to us, but as soon as it comes to the end of the shift you grab all the yarn on the bobbins.

Old Chao: Now then, don't you go making groundless accusations. We always change our bobbins according to schedule. We're one of the best teams in the shop as far as leaving the bobbins in good shape is concerned.

Wang (*impatiently*): I've heard enough. Will you stop bothering me? Run along now and do whatever it is you're meant to be doing.

Old Chao (*puzzled*): Are you really trying to get rid of me? After all, we've got to get someone from your team. It's only natural I should want to ask who it is.

Wang (*letting off steam*): For goodness' sake! You must be blind if you can't see I don't want to talk about it. Why must you come here just now?

Old Chao: Heaven help me, I didn't know I had to make an appointment with you!

Wang (*worried*): Oh dear, oh dear! What shall we do! They'll have a terrible quarrel.

Old Chao (*getting more and more puzzled*): What ever are you talking about?

Wang: Oh, do stop asking questions. Run along to the manager's office, can't you?

Old Chao: But if it's already decided that we're going to have someone from your team, why should I go back to him again? I tell you, I'm not budging until I've got someone. (*Plants himself down firmly.*)

Wang (*looking out of the window, in a worried tone*): Oh my, here comes the team leader. Now what's going to happen!

(*A pause. Chang Teh-yu comes angrily into the room.*)

Chang (*in a gruff, unfriendly tone*): Wang Chuan, get ready to go to C Shift.

Wang (*uneasily*): You . . . um . . . have you seen her?

Chang (*crossly*): Mind your own business! You're on her side, aren't you?

Old Chao (*quickly*): What about that transfer for our team?

Chang: It's all settled. You're getting a top-notch worker.

Old Chao (*sceptically*): Ah pooh! We wouldn't dare hope. . . .

Chang (*impatiently*): Shut up. You've got the red banner within your grasp now. Get along.

Old Chao: All right! I'm going to ask the manager. (*Exit.*)

Wang: What did she say?

Chang: She gave me hell! (*In a rage.*) Whew, did I catch it! She certainly made it clear she had no personal feeling for me. Fool that I was, I thought we were friends, and I tried as hard as I could to accept all her criticisms. But it's at a time like this that one gets to know what a person's really like.

Wang (*uneasily*): Oh dear! Don't talk like that. Anyway, I don't want to go to the other team any more.

Chang: You don't have to pacify me. Your wings have grown strong and you're quite skilled now. You go, if that's what's decided.

Wang: Please don't talk like that to me! Have I offended you, too?

Chang: Oh no, none of you have offended me. The team is my personal team, and it was I who offended you. (*Looking in the direction of the factory building to an imaginary Liu Lien-ying.*) I know you now. You only care about your work. You don't care a damn about anyone human. (*Sighs.*) How hungry I was when I went without food, and how sleepy when I went without sleep! How much time and energy have I spent, and what trouble I had to bring the team into proper shape! And now you must go and wreck it in one blow. If tomorrow No. 12 were to turn out a complete batch of sub-standard stuff, that would just top everything off. . . . There's nothing left for me as a team leader now! (*Pulls the cinema tickets out of his pocket.*) Why should I waste money on these things! (*Tears the tickets up.*)

Wang (*trying to stop him*): What are you doing? You're going to the pictures later, aren't you?

Chang: All she wants is to get me down. I'm not going to the pictures with her! I'm not going to be twisted round her little finger. (*With regret.*) I was a fool to wait so hopefully; months, it's been.

I kidded myself that things were going well. I thought I'd found someone at last, and that we understood each other and could help one another. But does she understand me, or want to help me? I gave her my heart, but has she got any heart for me?

Wang (*can't stand it any longer*): Oh Chang Teh-yu, don't go on like that! You've not understood her. Look, I won't go to the other team, if that'll make you feel better.

Chang: Oh no, you must go. Don't give her any more chances to take me to task in a big meeting. In the future, after I've finished with the bobbins I'll just stroll round to the rest room and have a cigarette in peace. Fulfil the quota, that's all I'll try to do. Why bother about anything else? Everything can go to hell for all I care. (*Takes up the wool.*) Will you tell her I've got someone else to knit this up for me?

Wang (*goes over to him, and tries to take the wool out of his hands*): Don't be like that. She was going to knit it up for you.

Chang: I don't want to be in her debt, thank you. I shan't die of cold without Miss Liu Lien-ying. Tell her that I've got other friends besides her and I'll be able to find someone to do it for me. (*Goes to the door.*)

Wang (*stopping him*): Don't go. Let me explain things for her.

Chang (*waving his hand*): Go away. I'll never come back here again to look for inspiration. (*Quickly exit.*)

Wang (*goes to the door*): Oh, team leader, team leader! (*No response. She walks back into the room in great perplexity.*) Oh dear, this is a dreadful business. What could have happened? Perhaps the manager gave him a dressing down, too. Lien-ying *is* frightfully strict, I must say. She knows perfectly well how he feels about the team. He

just can't be expected to take a thing like this all of a sudden. But why must she go and take it on herself to say so? (*Begins to grumble, puzzled.*) It . . . it all started because of me. It's all my fault. Why do they want to transfer me at this juncture? Why pick on me? (*Looks at the torn cinema tickets.*) With all this trouble they didn't even go to the pictures. They've been friends for months and this is what it comes to. (*Very unhappy.*) Where can Lien-ying be? And what shall I tell her when she comes back? She'll be heart-broken. (*The more she thinks the more disturbed she becomes. She puts her head down on the table and bursts into tears.*)

(*A pause. Liu Lien-ying, a pair of knitting needles in her hands, comes on.*)

Liu (*seeing Wang Chuan in tears, goes over to her and strokes her head*): Whatever's the matter, dear?

Wang (*wipes her eyes*): Oh, it's nothing. Why were you so long away? (*Speaking brings on her tears again.*)

Liu: What a baby you are! (*Wiping tears for Wang Chuan.*) There, there, don't cry.

Wang: Where have you been all this time?

Liu (*soothingly*): After we'd decided what to do I went to the co-op to get some knitting needles. I suppose you already know you're being transferred.

Wang: What did you say to the manager?

Liu: I didn't have to say anything. I'd no sooner gone into the room than he proposed it himself. Hasn't he been here to tell you?

Wang: He told me plenty! He was white in the face with rage.

Liu: I expect it was the reaction to the heated argument he had. He probably hasn't calmed down yet. He'll be all right after a bit.

Wang: That's what you think! He's taken his wool away.

Liu (*surprised*): Has he? What's he done that for?

Wang (*pointing to the torn tickets on the ground*): And see, he's torn up his cinema tickets.

Liu: Oh goodness! (*She is very taken aback.*) How could he behave like that? (*Walks with heavy steps to the bed, and puts down the knitting needles absent-mindedly.*)

Wang (*comforting her*): Please, Lien-ying, don't feel too bad.

Liu (*inwardly seething*): No . . . I'm not feeling bad. I just didn't know he was that kind of a man. (*Sadly.*) Ai!

Wang: If only you hadn't gone to the manager's office! It's all my fault, really. I shouldn't have agreed to go to the other team.

Liu (*rousing herself from the tumult in her own mind and speaking seriously*): No, you were quite right to agree. What he tried to do would have upset the work generally. I don't think the fault lies with you or me. You see, we've got to help one another, not only in our own team, but through the whole mill, in the campaign. Didn't they teach you that in the Youth League?

Wang: Oh yes, I know what you mean about that. But this is a personal question for you two. . . .

Liu: But you see the rights and wrongs of it are quite clear, and no matter what difficulties may come, we simply have to do what the Party asks of us. . . . (*With feeling.*) Wang Chuan, we must always remember what we belong to. The Youth League and the Party need a lot of living up to.

Wang (*bursting out*): Oh, Lien-ying, I understand now. (*Quickly drying her tears.*) You were right to do what you did. I was behaving like a child. Oh, what a lot I've learned from being with you! I do wish I could go on being with you.

Liu (*in a lighter vein*): You'd better be getting ready to go to C Shift, hadn't you, my dear?

Wang (*decidedly*): You're right. I'll go and see their team leader straight away. I'll go on night shift this evening, I think.

Liu: No, there's no need to do that. You'll be tired after the morning shift. We're not allowed to do two shifts in one day.

Wang: You've been so unselfish in all this. I just want to do my bit too.

Liu: But you were all set to go to the pictures. You're dressed for it too. I think you ought to go and enjoy yourself.

Wang (*remembering Liu's problem again*): But what about you two? After all this fuss and bother neither of you are going! What will you do with yourself?

Liu: I shall be all right. It's all in the day's work. (*Takes her tickets out of her pocket.*) Here you are; you take these, and see if any of the others are still in the hostel, and take two of them with you.

Wang: But you can't have finished with him just like that.

Liu: If he wants to behave so perversely, and doesn't want people to help him, that's that, isn't it? There's nothing more I can do.

Wang: It seems dreadful to break it off just like that.

Liu: It can't be helped. One can't help running into unpleasant things in this world. Time will cure it, I suppose.

Wang: No! Your friendship mustn't finish like that. Besides, his crossness won't last. He's got a quick temper, but he comes to his senses quickly too. He's probably realized the truth already. (*After a moment's hesitation.*) Perhaps I'd better go to his hostel and find him for you.

Liu (*pettishly*): Oh no, you don't! I've not been in the wrong. By the way he's behaving he doesn't seem to want to stay friends with me, so we might as well call it quits.

Wang: Oh no! It makes me sad to see you two like this. I must do something about it. If you don't want me to go now, I shall speak to him about it tomorrow.

Liu (*anxious to drop the subject*): All right, let's wait and see. You'd better hop off to the pictures now.

Wang: I don't think I want to go after all. I'll just go and have a look at C Shift. (*Goes to the door, but turns back, still very much concerned.*) Dear Lien-ying, promise me you won't feel bad. I'll be back in a few minutes. Why don't you come with me to my cousin's; we can have a good time there.

Liu: All right. You run along now.

(*Exit Wang.*)

Liu (*sits down on the bed and picks up the knitting needles. Stares into space for a long while*): Ai, such a little thing and this is what happens to me! (*Sighs.*) Well, that's that! (*Puts down the needles, and walks towards the windows. She sees the torn cinema tickets and picks them up. Is again lost in thought. A pause.*) No, I can't let it finish just like that. I'll go and talk to him. . . . (*Goes towards the door. But after a few steps, pauses.*) Ai, what is there to talk about? I did what was right. . . . (*Returns to the room and sits down on the chair. A pause. Sadly.*) Oh well, I'd better get on with some work, I suppose. I'll write out the group plan. (*Gets out writing materials and with an effort begins to write. She can't keep it up, however. She is too agitated at heart, and with a sigh buries her head in her hands.*)

(*There is a knock at the door.*)

Liu (*straightens up and hastily smoothes her hair*): Come in!

(*The door opens and Chang Teh-yu holding something wrapped in his coat appears.*)

Liu (*taken aback*): Oh, it's you.

(*Chang stands in the doorway.*)

Liu (*sees that the bundle he is carrying is the wool. She is overjoyed*): Oh good, you've brought it back.

Chang: Well, I really came to see Wang Chuan.

Liu (*goes to him and takes the coat and wool out of his hands*): Come on now. You've straightened things out in your mind, haven't you? Let's forget the whole thing now. I've even bought the needles to knit your pull-over.

Chang: I . . . how dare I ask you to do that!

Liu: Are you still angry with me?

Chang: I'm not angry with anyone.

Liu (*puts the coat and wool on the bed, and says seriously*): Tell me, what have I done that you should talk to me like this?

Chang: You . . . you should know that better than anyone else.

Liu: I know you are angry because you don't want to transfer Wang Chuan. But didn't you propose it to the manager yourself?

Chang: With you standing over me, what else could I have done?

Liu: You're sore because you know you were in the wrong. Do you really feel I was wrong to insist on you doing it?

Chang: Oh no, you were right. You're always right. Is that what you want me to say?

Liu: Can't you think it over carefully, and understand why I had to do it? Of course I realize that our team has every chance of being the model team, and I know, too, that Wang Chuan is our main prop. In fact, she's not only our best worker but my closest friend too. When she goes to the other shift I personally lose a lot. I shall miss her terribly. But we haven't got any choice, have we? The other team is desperately short of good workers.

Chang: You've said enough! For goodness' sake, stop attacking me with these grand words.

Liu: You'll see my point if you think things over carefully. Don't you remember how our team suffered when we had changes? In '52, when we were getting poor-quality cotton, and having a hard time with our spinning, didn't C Shift transfer two learners to us one after another? And wasn't that the reason why we couldn't fulfil our quota for three whole months? I remember how bitterly you grumbled at the time! We know what it's like, so we shouldn't do it to others. Now, in this campaign, some of the team leaders are too anxious to grab the red banner, and they've been behaving badly, so much so that it's harmed the solidarity of the mill. We shouldn't do that, should we?

Chang: If you keep on preaching we'll never get anywhere. You should try to understand why I'm feeling like this.

Liu: I do understand rather too well. You feel very bitter and fight tooth and nail when one of your workers has to be transferred to another team. Why didn't you stop and count the number of teams in our mill? There's quite a lot of them! If none of the others can fulfil their quota, what's the use of your team doing it on its own? But you don't give a damn for the others.

Chang: I'm not fighting for private interests. The yarn produced by our team goes to the state; I am not putting it into my own pocket. If our team does well, it's good for the state, so it's really the state's interest.

Liu: The way you are ignoring the difficulties of others and carrying on like this means you're no longer thinking and acting in the interests of the state. There's only one thing to call it: you're doing it for yourself. That's plain self-interest.

Chang (*startled*): What?

Liu: You have gone so far that it wouldn't be fair to you not to say it. You talk of whole-hearted devotion

to the team and acting only in its interest, but actually you've got your eyes on the red banner for your own pride. You want to be the leader of the model team, to sit in the front row at meetings and to be praised wherever you go.

Chang (*angry and ashamed*): Go on. Put a big cap on my head and tell me it fits. I never had such ideas. . . .

Liu: Don't shrink away because it sounds bad when it happens to be the truth. When you've got such thoughts in your head you can't listen to good advice. You don't realize that you're sinking yourself into the mire of petty individual interest.

Chang (*nearly speechless*): You! . . . all right, do your worst, I know what you want.

Liu: What do you know? You can't even distinguish a true friend from false. (*Full of emotion.*) In the winter when I was sick in hospital, you came to visit me. I was down in the dumps and terribly homesick, but because you came every day and helped me patiently, I soon got better and left the hospital. I was very happy to return to the mill and before long I completed the probationary period and became a full member of the Party. Ever since then, I realized that a friend who can help one think in the right way is one's dearest and nearest friend. . . . After that . . . (*a pause*) after that you know quite well what we've been to each other. I had hoped from the bottom of my heart that our friendship would last a lifetime. Whenever you criticized me or expressed an opinion I always complied cheerfully and corrected myself as quickly as I could. I interested myself in your affairs too and criticized you in the same spirit. When I heard you had difficulties in your work I often lay awake at night worrying about it, racking my brains to think of a good way of helping you. In the last six months I felt that though neither of us mentioned it, we

have in fact drawn much closer to each other. When I see comrades who haven't enough mutual understanding marry in haste and bury themselves in babies and good food, when I see them gradually drop behind politically and quarrel about purely domestic matters, I was surer than ever that you and I have taken the right road. I was so happy, and dreamed so many dreams: I even wrote and told my mother about it. I had a letter from her just now. (*Another pause.*) I thought our friendship was unshakable. I never imagined that today, in my effort to help you so that you could keep up your reputation of being an excellent team leader, you would behave like this, treat me with such hostility, and behave as if I were your enemy. To think you'd come down to this! You have made me lose confidence in myself.

Chang: I do believe you are speaking from your heart. But in today's matter you've made it too hard for me. I simply can't understand. . . .

Liu: Now that we've come to this, I no longer hope that you would understand me. I don't care what you think of me personally. You can think what you like. But you have been wrong in your approach to this question. You must recognize your mistake at once. Go humbly and honestly before the Party and criticize yourself. . . .

Chang: I don't see any reason to criticize myself . . . I'm not as bad as you try to make out. . . .

Liu (*in disgust*): How can you be so obstinate? Don't you want to recognize your mistake?

Chang: No, don't get me wrong. It's not that I don't want to admit my mistake. It's just that we've got that wretched No. 12 and conditions are really difficult in our team . . . I simply couldn't help doing what I did.

Liu (*solemnly*): No matter what you say, the Party will not let you entertain such erroneous ideas.

Chang (*knowing that he's in the wrong*): I'm not the only one, you know. Haven't you seen how others. . . .

Liu: If that's the way you feel about it, all right. We have nothing more to say to each other. (*She bends the steel needles in her hands.*) Go ahead and do what you like.

Chang (*startled*): What are you saying?

Liu: I can't stoop to a person like you.

(*Chang stands transfixed in thought. Old Chao comes on.*)

Old Chao (*walking to Chang and full of feeling*): Chang, old man, I . . . I'm overwhelmed. . . .

Chang (*puzzled*): What is it now?

Old Chao: You've done something I couldn't have done. You have transferred Wang Chuan to our team. You give us such an excellent worker. . . . (*Chang is silent.*)

Old Chao: You've set an example to all of us. You followed the Party's call to co-operate and help one another, and showed us what we should all do. You have really gone a step ahead of me. (*Produces a piece of paper.*) Here, take this! You'll find in it directions on how to handle No. 12.

Chang (*surprised*): What did you say? No. 12?

Old Chao: I'm the only person in the shop who knows what's wrong with that spinning frame. But you see I didn't intend to tell you about it before. (*With earnest goodwill.*) I've swallowed more cotton fluff than you and this is a bit of an old hand's experience! Just follow the directions I've written down when you guide the traverse board and the gill, and then you won't have to stand by and watch it every second. It won't produce bad stuff for you again.

(*Very much moved, Chang takes the piece of paper.*)

Old Chao (*produces a letter*): This is a message from our C Shift's No. 2 team. "We pledge ourselves to follow your advanced way of thinking, to help our work-mates, to build up a feeling of solidarity and make our emulation campaign a real emulation of good points."

(*Slowly, Chang takes the letter and hands it to Liu Lien-ying. She puts it on the table. Wang Chuan dashes in, very much excited.*)

Wang (*calling as she runs in*): Lien-ying, Lien-ying! (*To Chang when she catches sight of him.*) How is it that you're back here again? Haven't you seen the board? Our team's been commended!

Chang (*puzzled*): What for?

Wang (*gesticulating wildly*): The characters are as big as this! "A Shift's No. 2 team shows a true fraternal spirit in the emulation campaign. Transfers excellent bobbin worker to support brother team!" Look! (*Points out of the window.*) There's a crowd outside the shop reading it. . . .

Chang: Ai! (*Lowers his head.*)

Wang (*to Chang*): Well, what have you got to say now! (*To Liu.*) Oh, Lien-ying, it's you who have brought such honour to our team . . . (*emotionally*) I'll never forget you, and how you did this.

Old Chao: Chang, old chap, I confess the bottom formation we used to leave you could be better. You wait and see. We'll make it much better.

(*Chang is touched and turns away from the others to dab at his eyes with a handkerchief.*)

Wang (*to Chao*): I think I'd better come to work this evening.

Old Chao: No, don't! You worked the morning shift. You'll tire yourself out. We'll manage somehow today. You start in on Monday. (*To Chang.*) Well, I must be going. (*Goes to Chang and again grips his hand. Exit.*)

Wang (*to Liu, full of interest*): How is it with you two?

Liu (*shaking her head*): Don't ask me.

Wang (*after a little thought*): I think I'll go to C Shift for a look. (*Calling.*) Chao! Old Chao, wait for me. (*Runs off.*)

(*Liu Lien-ying takes off her jacket and puts on the old coat she was wearing in the beginning of the act. She walks towards the door.*)

Chang (*following behind her and in a tender tone*): Where are you going?

Liu: To the Party branch. . . .

Chang: Are you going there to discuss me? You needn't go; I'll go of my own accord and criticize myself. . . .

Liu: Why should I go there to discuss you? I want to discuss what to do to help Liu Sheng. . . .

Chang: Let's go together then.

Liu (*stepping back*): You can go by yourself. I'll go on Monday.

Chang (*penitently*): Comrade Lien-ying, I do really understand you now. Can you go on helping me?

Liu (*in a huff*): I don't see how we can go on as we did, now. You've brought this upon yourself. There is nothing I can do about it.

Chang (*sighs sadly, takes up the wool and with sincerity*): Comrade Liu Lien-ying, I am still a Communist, I know how to deal with my mistakes. As long as you are still in the mill you'll see for yourself. (*Gives Liu Lien-ying a lingering glance and stalks to the door. Exit.*)

Liu (*gazing at his retreating back, is lost in thought*): I . . . I shouldn't go on treating him so harshly. He's the kind of man who corrects himself with determination as soon as he recognizes his mistake. . . . (*Picks up the knitting needles on the ground.*) O look, I've bent them. (*A pause.*) I suppose I'll have to straighten them out. (*Goes quickly to the door. She bumps into Chang Teh-yu who is being pushed back into the room by Wang Chuan.*)

Wang (*to Chang*): There's no need to go now! There'll be plenty of time for you to go and criticize yourself after you've been to the pictures.

Liu: Give me that wool. Let me knit the pull-over for you. (*Takes the wool. As she looks at Chang her affection is unmistakable.*)

Curtain

Translated by Tang Sheng

THE DAY THE NEW DIRECTOR CAME

HO CHIU

CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

Lao Li, *the messenger at the General Administration Office of a certain bureau, aged 50*

Liu Shan-chi, *a man in his forties, chief of the General Administration Office*

Tai Wei, *general clerk in the General Administration Office*

Chu Ling, *in her twenties, from the Construction Section Office*

Comrade Chung, *an office worker*

Chang Yun-tung, *in the neighbourhood of fifty, the new director of the Bureau*

TIME

A morning in late spring

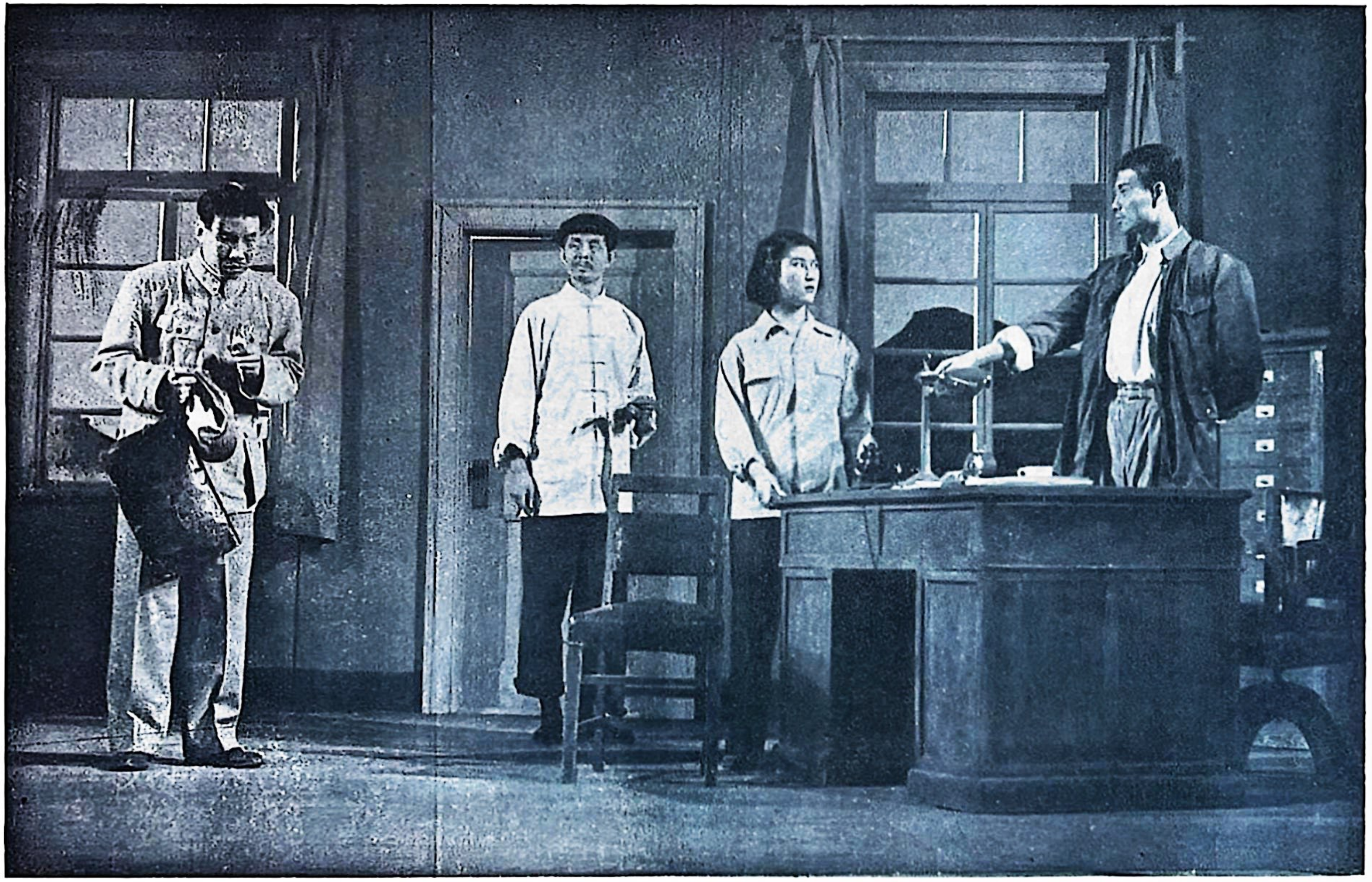
PLACE

The director's office in a certain bureau

SETTING

Centre, back, a double frosted glass door opens on to a corridor. On the corridor side of the door, seen backwards from the audience, is "Private, Director of Bureau," in black paint. Left, there is a door which opens into the General Administration Office. Right, windows. The director's office is furnished with an

China Youth Art Theatre's Production



executive desk, a swivel chair, a filing cabinet, and a round conference table and chairs. On the desk, stationery, a desk telephone, a small desk clock and a bell push.

When the curtain rises, the door into the corridor is shut. The door to the General Administration Office is open. Lao Li is sitting at the round table poring over a book, marking passages as he reads, his dust pan and a broom beside him on the floor. The sky seen through the window is overcast; it looks like rain.

A volley of knocks is heard at the glass door. Lao Li puts his book down and hurries to open it. Liu Shan-chi, a bulging portfolio under his arm, rushes in.

Liu Shan-chi (*throwing the portfolio on the desk, gives a quick look at the door on the left and then says to Lao Li*): Nobody here yet?

Lao Li (*baffled*): Who should be here?

Liu (*again looking left through the door*): Where's everybody? Hasn't Comrade Tai come yet?

Lao Li (*looking at the clock*): Why, chief, there's an hour still before office hours begin.

Liu: Office hours! What d'you mean, office hours! You people talk as though you're paid by the hour! The new director'll be coming this afternoon and there you are, waiting around for office hours! (*Picks up the book from the table.*) Whose is this?

Lao Li: Mine.

Liu (*patronizingly*): Studying the General Line,* eh?

Lao Li: Yes.

Liu (*throws the book down*): Messengers like you would do better, as far as the General Line goes, to put your minds to keeping the office clean and seeing to taking round the tea. (*Points at the dust pan lying on the floor.*) Look at that! The way you throw your dust pan and broom about is not according to the General Line, I can tell you. May I ask when you're going to clear up?

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*General principles of the policy to be adopted for building socialism in China, put forward by the Communist Party, and adopted by the government after nation-wide discussion.

(*Lao Li quietly picks up his dust pan and broom and starts to go.*)

Liu: Hey, you, hold on a minute!

(*Lao Li halts.*)

Liu: Have you got the director's new office ready yet?

Lao Li: Yes.

Liu: Have the curtains and covers come?

Lao Li: Yes.

Liu: Have you put them up?

Lao Li: Yes.

Liu: I'll have a look later. That's all.

(*Exit Lao Li, left, with his dust pan and broom.*)

Liu (*sits down, wipes his perspiring forehead, picks up the telephone and dials a number*): Hello! That the Chien Hsin Furniture Company? I want to speak to your manager. . . . (*Gruffly.*) Never mind who's calling. Just tell him to come to the phone. (*Impatiently presses the bell. When nobody comes, he calls, left.*) Lao Li! Lao Li!

(*Lao Li enters hurriedly.*)

Liu: Go and fetch Comrade Tai.

Lao Li: Very well. (*Walks to the left door.*)

Liu: Wait!

(*Lao Li stops.*)

Liu (*The receiver is buzzing. He quickly speaks into the phone*): Hello! This is Liu Shan-chi speaking. (*Motions Lao Li away.*) You may go.

(*Exit Lao Li, left.*)

Liu: Hello! About the sofas we bought yesterday. Why haven't they been delivered yet? . . . What's that? No, nothing doing! They've got to be delivered before nine . . . before nine, I say, and not a minute later. (*He slams the receiver down, and then picks it up and dials again.*) Hello! Who's that? Oh, it's you, Lao Lu! I say, you know that spring bed we bought for our director yesterday? I want it delivered right away.

(*There are loud voices off, left.*)

Liu (*unable to hear the voice in the telephone, puts his hand over the mouthpiece and shouts loudly, left*): Who's making all that noise there?
(*Tai Wei puts his head around the door, left.*)
Tai Wei (*timidly*): It's me, chief. . . .
Liu: What the hell are you shouting about? Can't you see I'm trying to telephone?
Tai Wei: Comrade Chu of the Construction Section. . . .
Liu: It would be! Tell her she'll have to wait.
Tai Wei: All right. (*His head disappears.*)
Liu (*on the phone again*): Hello! Hello! Hello, hello! (*No answer.*) Damn it! (*Slams down the receiver.*)
(*The quarrelsome voices have not been stilled outside. Liu Shan-chi presses the bell petulantly. Tai Wei enters.*)
Liu: What's all the argument about?
Tai Wei: It's those Construction Section people. . . .
(*Chu Ling enters on Tai Wei's heels.*)
Chu Ling: Comrade Liu, just look at the sky! I'm sure it's going to rain today. And you know we can't leave that cement outside any longer.
Liu (*assuming a considerate air, with an effort*): Comrade Chu, I thought you'd covered up that cement with oiled cloth?
Chu: I've got some, that's true, but seven or eight bags got soaked the day before yesterday when it rained, for all that.
Liu: Well, there simply isn't any storage space for it, so what do you expect me to do about it?
Chu: I know the storage is a problem, but something's got to be done about it just the same. That cement's government property, you know, and we can't just stand by and see it wasted, can we?
Liu: I've studied the General Line too, thank you! That doesn't alter the fact that we've got no storage place. That's where the difficulty lies.
Chu: I thought difficulties are meant to be overcome, aren't they?

Liu (*looking trapped*): All right, all right. I'll try to overcome them — I promise. (*Looks at his watch.*) It's nearly time to start work; I'll talk it over then and see what can be done.

Chu: You people observe working hours pretty strictly, don't you?

Liu: Well, that's in conformity with the General Line, isn't it? It calls for increased production, but says nothing about overtime.

Chu: I'm afraid the rain won't keep to office hours! If that cement gets damaged, it'll be your office that's held responsible.

Liu: All right, all right! We'll take full responsibility. Only give me a little time, please. (*Looks at his watch again.*) Half an hour, and it'll be fixed. How's that?

Chu: All right, then. I'll be back in half an hour. (*Exit, left.*)

Liu: H'mmm! That Construction Section ought to be called the problem-making department. They've just no consideration for others.

Tai Wei: They're all the same there. Look at them! She herself came over five times yesterday, fussing away. She wouldn't listen to a thing I said. All she could see was her 300 bags of cement. She never gave a thought to our headaches.

Liu: When she comes back, just tell her that nothing can be done for the moment. And mind you don't let her get hold of me, whatever happens.

Tai Wei: You know she was demanding that downstairs room back, just then?

Liu: What the hell! I purposely had that room emptied for the new director. Can't she see it has been newly done up?

Tai Wei: I told her that, but she said it was a waste of money. She said she couldn't see why we had to spend money on a new office for the director when there was this one already.

Liu: You can just tell her that this one's too small. It's not suitable for a director. And anyway, my office has got to handle all manner of business. We're overworked actually. We can't carry on without a decent office for ourselves, in fact.

Tai Wei: Well, she went on to speak her mind about us and said that it was only because we wanted a bigger office for our section that there was nowhere for the cement to go.

Liu: Nag, nag, nag! Always criticizing! (*Changes the subject, pointing at the lettering on the centre door.*) Why hasn't that been changed yet?

Tai Wei: I'll get it done right away. Very simple. It only means changing "Director of Bureau" to "Chief of Section."

Liu: But I want another line underneath, "General Administration Office."

Tai Wei: Very well.

(*Lao Li enters, left, with a wooden sign, saying: Private, Director of Bureau.*)

Lao Li: Chief, here's the new sign.

Liu (*takes over the sign and examines the writing*): H'mmm! Sung dynasty style, eh! Not bad! Not bad at all! (*Hands it to Tai Wei.*) Have it hung right away.

Tai Wei (*takes it*): Very well. (*To Lao Li, pointing to the glass door.*) Lao Li, scratch off "Director of Bureau" there, will you? I'll send someone over to do the painting.

Lao Li: Right you are.

(*Tai Wei and Liu Shan-chi exeunt, left.*)

Lao Li (*muttering*): I must say he's got a lot of energy, that chief of ours. He's even got to see to hanging up signs! (*As he talks, he starts to scratch the words off the glass door with an old knife.*)

(*Enter Comrade Chung from left.*)

Chung: Lao Li, where is your section chief?

Lao Li: He went downstairs.

Chung: Can you find him for me?

Lao Li: The office isn't open yet, Comrade Chung. Is there something special you want to see him about?

Chung: Yes. You know how the roof of our hostel leaks. I want to know whether the General Administration Office is going to do anything about it or not.

Lao Li: Of course we are. But Comrade Chung, our section chief. . . .

Chung: Your section chief knows too well how not to do things. All he ever does is talk about "the budget" or the "bureau rules." Now, when he comes in, will you be sure to tell him this: we've found a man to do the roof ourselves. He'll be coming in a minute. What we want is for your office to see him, and settle the price. If your chief refuses to pay for it, we'll share the expenses among ourselves.

Lao Li: Who is this man? What's his name?

Chung: He's the manager of the Hsiang Tai Construction Company. Rather a tall fellow. His name's Chang.

Lao Li: All right, then. When he comes, I'll take him to see the section chief.

Chung: Thanks very much. (*Exit, centre door.*)

Lao Li (*shaking his head with a sigh*): What's the use? The whole department is so busy with this new director coming that we don't know whether we're on our heads or our heels. How shall we find the time to bother about a thing like a leaking roof? (*He resumes his work on the door with his knife. There is a short pause. Then a knock on the door is heard. Lao Li stops his work and opens the door. Enter Chang Yun-tung.*)

Chang Yun-tung: Excuse me, is this the director's office?

Lao Li: Well. . . . (*Looking at the words on the glass.*) It was, but now it is the chief of the General Administration Office.

Chang: Where's your section chief then?

Lao Li (*taking a good look at the visitor*): Why? Do you want to see him?

Chang: Yes.

Lao Li: Your name, please?

Chang: My name's Chang.

Lao Li: Oh, yes! Manager Chang.

Chang (*puzzled*): Manager Chang?

Lao Li: Yes, I know about you. Comrade Chung's just this moment told me. (*In an earnest voice.*) I really ought to tell you it's not a good moment, Manager Chang. Why butt your head against the wall? Our new director's coming to take over this afternoon, and our section chief's madly busy getting his new office ready. He's got his hands full. He'll never give the time to talk to you about house repairs.

Chang (*more and more puzzled*): House repairs?

Lao Li: Yes, of course. In the first place, you see, there's no doubt that our hostel building *is* a bit ancient, and on top of that, the storm we had last week smashed a lot of tiles. So now, every time it rains, there's a proper lake indoors! But what can we do about it? The office for the new director needs whitewashing, and new furnishings and new flooring, not to mention sofas and a spring bed. That'll cost us over 400 yuan alone. How much does that leave for house repairs this month, I ask you!

Chang: Yes, but if your roof leaks so badly, it's got to be done somehow.

Lao Li: Of course it should. We've had such a lot of rain recently, and whenever it comes down half the workers simply stop and go over there to get the leaking-pans out. If it happens to rain during

the night, well, nobody gets any sleep. The result is that they've practically declared war on the General Administration Office! But our chief is the kind who sticks to his rules and keeps a tight hold on the purse-strings, and all he'll do is to tell everyone they'll have to put up with it until next month.

Chang: Whereabouts is the hostel? Can you let me have a look at it?

Lao Li: You can easily find it yourself. Downstairs and turn right. You can't miss it. Come to think of it, Manager Chang, it wouldn't be a bad idea if you went there now just to take a look, and make an estimate. It'll have to be done next month anyway, and then we can give you the contract.

Chang (*nodding, with a faint smile*): Thank you. That'll be fine. (*Exit, centre door.*)

(*The sky outside is getting darker. Now and again there's a distant roll of thunder.*)

Lao Li (*looks out at the window with a sigh*): There's going to be another shower. I'd better close these windows now, so the floor doesn't get wet again.

(*He shuts all the windows, and then picks up the knife and goes back to his scratching.*)

(*Chu Ling and Liu Shan-chi enter, left, arguing with each other.*)

Liu: You win, you win, my dear Comrade Chu. But you promised to give me half an hour, and here you've hardly turned your back before you come bothering me again. If everyone behaved this way, how d'you think I'd be able to get any work done at all?

Chu: What ever do you mean, bothering you?—Bothering! What a word to use! I'm here on proper business, mine and yours.

Liu: I'll take you at your word on that, comrade! If it's business, let's go about it in a business-like way. So let me remind you, Comrade Chu, that it's not our office hours yet.

Chu: Oh, pooh! You can see for yourself how it's getting darker and darker, and you must have heard the thunder just now!

Liu: I know, I know, I heard it. But you must also admit that we provided you with oiled cloth, didn't we?

Chu: Of course I know you did, but the stuff you gave us was perished. It's not water-proof any longer.

Liu (*vexed*): You do nothing but make demands all the time! What are you really after?

Chu: That room downstairs.

Liu: What room?

Chu: The one where the cement used to be stored.

Liu: My dear girl, that room's the new office for the Director of the Bureau. Do you mean to say that you want to use the director's office for storing cement in?

Chu: Not all of it. Half would do us very nicely, if you really can't find a vacant place for us anywhere else.

Liu: Let you have half of it?

Chu: That would do, I reckon. Three hundred bags of cement, you see . . . I think half the room would do.

Liu: I see! Half the room for your cement and the other half for the director's office. Sweet and simple, isn't it?

Chu: Don't you really think you ought to do something about that cement? It's very important to us, you know.

Liu: Now, which is more important, some cement belonging to the Construction Section, or the office for the director? Anyhow, the director's coming this afternoon. D'you think I'd let anyone mess his office up? Not on your life!

(*There is another roll of thunder.*)

Chu (*agitated*): D'you hear that? More thunder! It'll rain any minute! You must do something, for goodness' sake!

Liu (*calmly*): Comrade, you've studied the General Line, haven't you? There's the economy drive to think of, isn't there? After all, you keep on forgetting that we've managed to supply you with that oiled cloth. That's already something, in view of the need for economy, I can tell you.

Chu: Yes, but what about the cement? You simply don't. . . . (*A loud peal of thunder.*) See? The rain will start any minute!

(*Chang Yun-tung enters, centre.*)

Chang (*to Lao Li*): Comrade, where's your section chief? I must see him.

Lao Li (*in a tight corner*): Manager Chang, you . . . you had better not. . . .

Liu (*ill-humoured*): What is it now?

Lao Li: Eh . . . h'mm! Pardon me, Manager Chang, this gentleman *is* our section chief.

Liu (*to Lao Li*): Who's this?

Lao Li: It's Manager Chang, the contractor for the roof. Comrade Chung sent him over.

Chang: I beg your pardon, I am. . . .

Liu (*interrupting him*): Which roof needs repairing?

Lao Li: The roof of the staff's hostel. It lets in water all over.

Chang: That's a fact. I've just had a good look at it.

Liu: Well, I'll be damned! Just for a few drops of rain, they kick up such a commotion. They don't seem to understand that we'd never get our work done if we didn't keep to the rules. If everyone can go and get a roofing contractor in every time they think something wants repairing, where ever should I be?

Chang: I think it's very possible that they haven't kept to your rules. But who's really responsible for that?

Liu: Look here, you run along and talk to whoever it was who got you here. (*Looks at his watch. To Lao Li.*) There's half an hour before it's time to start. I'm going to have a bit of shut-eye and I don't want you to let anyone disturb me. (*He puts his portfolio under his arm and makes ready to leave.*) (*Chu Ling immediately bars the way.*)

Chu: I'm not going to let you get away like that! Those 300 bags of cement simply mustn't be left out in the rain again.

Liu: What do you propose to do about it, then?

Chu: I want to use that downstairs room. Look here, Comrade Liu, the new director isn't coming till the afternoon, is he? We've got until then. You could easily let us use it for the time being. Directly it stops raining we'll shift it again.

Liu: You've got a nerve! You see for yourself, comrade, that room's just been whitewashed and the floor's been waxed. By the time you've had your cement in and out, d'you think the room would ever get cleaned up again?

Chu: Oh, you always have good reasons for not doing anything. Talking never gets anywhere with you. I can tell you, Comrade Liu, that I am going right down to get someone to give me a hand with moving that cement. If we do mess the room up, and if it upsets the new director, I'll take the consequences. (*She starts to go off, left.*)

Liu (*jauntily*): Sorry, Comrade Chu, but you'll find the door locked. (*He fishes a key out of his pocket, tosses it nonchalantly, and then gives it to Lao Li.*) Here, it'll be in your charge. When the sofas come, see that they're put in the office. (*He turns away, pauses, and speaks again to Lao Li.*) No one is allowed to open the door without my direct permission! D'you understand? (*Sweeping everybody with a glance, he goes off, left.*)

Chu (*vehemently*): Look at that! Just look at that! I don't know what goes on in his head, I'm sure! (*She is so angry that she can say no more and she sits down to get a breath.*)

Lao Li (*with a sympathetic sigh*): He's got a heart of cement.

Chang (*to Chu Ling*): Comrade, are those bags piled up downstairs the cement you've been talking about?

Chu: Yes. But if it gets wet it won't be cement any more. What good are a few sheets of oiled cloth?

Chang: Why does it have to be stored outside?

Chu: It used to be stored in that empty room downstairs. Then, with the change of director, the chief of the General Administration Office said we were to move it out, so that he could have the room redecorated for the director's office. He promised that something would be done about the cement, but we never thought that this something would turn out to be a couple of sheets of oiled cloth!

Chang: What was the matter with this office? Why change it?

Chu: This one's too small, it seems. After all, it *is* for the director. It should be grander, I suppose.

Chang: Grander! Do you think that's the real reason?

Chu: What do you think?

Chang: I think it's pure nonsense!

Chu: I couldn't agree more! Pure, unadulterated nonsense! All he cares about is how his own office looks — government property doesn't matter! What would you call such a director?

Chang (*grinning*): I should say he was a bad one, if he's really like that. (*Another roll of thunder, this time loud and near.*)

Chu: Oh! The rain's going to start!

Lao Li (*looks out at the window*): That's right; here it comes!

(*Chu Ling runs over to the window, opens it and puts her hand out, then shuts the window hastily.*)

Chu: It's started! My poor cement'll be soaked. (*Rushes to the door, left.*)

Lao Li: What are you going to do, Comrade Chu?

Chu: I'm going over to my office to see if there's anyone there who can help.

Lao Li: Well! If your office could think of a way out, you could have saved yourself all your trips here.

Chu (*in a quandary*): Oh, what can we do? (*She pauses a moment, and then an idea comes to her.*) I've got it! I can get the bed quilts! (*She starts to run off.*)

Lao Li: Then, Comrade Chu, how many quilts would you need? You'd need all the bed quilts we have, and then no one will be able to sleep! Come on, let's move that cement. I've got the key.

Chu: Oho! Move it! Into the new director's office?

Lao Li: It's the only place there is, isn't it? Let's move it there, for the time being, anyway.

Chu: What about you? Won't you get into trouble with your boss?

Lao Li: Never mind about him. I may be only the messenger, but I've studied the General Line myself, and *I've* got things clear now. Come on! I'll be fully responsible.

Chang (*to Lao Li*): Comrade, you are doing the right thing.

Chu (*shaking hands with Lao Li excitedly*): Good for you, Lao Li!

Lao Li: All right, but let's go. There's no time to waste.

(*Chu Ling and Lao Li are just going when Chu Ling stops.*)

Chu: Oh, I forgot! There'll be no one to give us a hand! With this rain everyone'll be over in the

hostel putting pans under the leaks! Where on earth can we get help?

Chang: Don't worry, come on. We'll all come.

Chu: But three of us won't be enough! There are 300 bags of the stuff! It'll take us all day. The moment it comes down really hard, it'll all be done for, for all our worrying.

Chang: Then go and tell everyone to come over immediately to salvage the cement. Tell them the new director says so.

Chu: The new director says so? I oughtn't to say that, ought I?

Chang: Go and try. I'm sure they'll believe you.

Chu: But you . . . you really mean I should fool them?

Chang: You won't be fooling them. I am. . . .

Chu (*with a start*): What? Are you? . . .

Lao Li: Do you mean to say you're. . . .

Chang (*smiling*): Yes, I'm the new director of your Bureau.

(*Chu Ling and Lao Li are both dumbfounded.*)

Chu: Well! . . . the new director! (*She is so overcome with excitement that she doesn't know what to say.*) Come on, Lao Li, let's go and shift that cement!

Chang: That's the stuff! I'll be along immediately. You two go ahead and get everyone together.

Chu: Of course, of course! (*She pulls Lao Li out through the centre door jubilantly.*)

(*Chang Yun-tung scribbles down a note, using the pen and paper on the desk, and follows them.*)

(*The stage is empty for a few moments. Vivid flashes of lightning can be seen through the window. The noise of rain gradually grows louder. Liu Shan-chi and Tai Wei enter, left.*)

Liu: No, I said nothing of the kind. Get on the phone and tell them to send them over immediately.

Tai Wei: Very well. (*Takes up the receiver.*)

(*Liu Shan-chi sits down at the round table, smoking.*)

Tai Wei (*speaking on the phone*): Hello! Is that the Chien Hsin Furniture Company? I want to speak to your manager. . . . Oh, good morning, manager. Our section chief told me to get on to you to see whether you've sent the sofas we bought. . . . Not yet? Why not? . . . You've got to wait until the rain stops? (*Puts his hand over the mouthpiece and speaks to Liu Shan-chi.*) He says he'll send them as soon as it stops raining.

Liu: Nonsense! Ask him if he is a meteorologist, or something, who knows when the rain's going to stop.

Tai Wei (*speaking into the phone*): Hello! My chief wants me to ask you if you are a meteorologist, and know when the rain will stop . . . no? Well, then, you'd better do something. . . .

Liu: I'll give him half an hour to deliver them.

Tai Wei (*speaking into the phone*): Hello! My chief gives you another half hour to deliver them in. . . . What's that? Oh, I see! (*Puts his hand over the mouthpiece and speaks to Liu Shan-chi.*) He says as soon as he can have them packed in oiled cloth, he'll send them over.

Liu: Nothing doing! Oiled cloth's no good! (*Grabs the receiver from Tai Wei, and speaks himself.*) Hello! Let me ask you just one question: Have you studied the General Line or not? Those sofas have been bought by the government; they're state property. We've got to take good care of them. . . . Nonsense! That won't do! What are you thinking of! Oiled cloth is no good. You'll have to get a van. . . . What's that? Transport charges? You must charge us? All right, all right! But mind you send them over at once! (*Hangs up the phone.*) Can't see an inch beyond their own interests, these business people. He even tries to make a bit on the transport.

(*Chang Yun-tung enters, centre, soaked through, mopping his face with a handkerchief.*)

Liu: So you're still here. It's no use you hanging around, I tell you; we're not interested in house repairs.

Chang: Why not? That dormitory leaks like a sieve. Why don't you repair it?

Liu: I like that! Surely it's up to us to decide whether it needs repairing or not, isn't it? I fail to see that it's any of your business.

Chang: Why don't you go and look at it yourself? Have you any idea what state that hostel's in? Pails, basins, spittoons — everything is mobilized. What's more, you have to keep on shifting the things around from one corner to the other. All your workers' quilts are drenched. Don't you worry about things like that?

Liu: Now look here! It's not your business to read me a lecture: I should have known better than to waste any courtesy on commercial people like you. The movement against the Five Corruptions is hardly over, and yet here you are, worming your way right into our Bureau. I wondered what you were up to here!

(*While this exchange is going on, Tai Wei discovers the note on the desk. He reads it, jumps, and hastens to hand it to Liu Shan-chi.*)

Tai Wei: Chief, our director. . . .

Liu (*takes the slip, but doesn't look at it*): Incidentally, I must warn you our new director thoroughly detests the likes of you. If you are wise you'll get out before you're kicked out. Otherwise, if you run into him, you won't be treated with the consideration I've shown you.

Tai Wei (*pointing to the slip in Liu Shan-chi's hand*): But . . . but the new director has come. . . .

Liu (*still has no ear for Tai Wei*): That reminds me, when the director comes, I certainly shan't forget

to report all this to him. See if I don't tell him how much trouble the people here make for me, sending over a private contractor here.

Chang: Trouble for *you*? When it rains, your people have to leave their offices and go over to the hostel to put out the pans to catch the drips! Do you realize the loss that causes? Not to mention the conditions in the hostel itself, with everything damp, and getting mildewed! Don't you realize that'll affect their health? Why do you always have to stick to your budget and rules so rigidly and always insist upon doing nothing "until next month"?

Liu (*in a rage*): Damn you! Do you realize where you are? This is an office, a government office! I forbid you to brawl here. (*To Tai Wei.*) Throw him out!

Tai Wei (*trying to push Chang Yun-tung out*): You'd better leave, Manager Chang, you'd better leave. You might as well give up hope of getting any business from us. It won't do you any good to exasperate him! Think of the old saying, "Go out to get wool, and come home shorn."

Chang (*protesting aloud*): Let me tell you something, Comrade Liu. When you hear yourself criticized, remain cool and think things over. It'll do you good.

Liu (*stamping his feet*): Get out! Get out, I say!

Tai Wei: Now, now, please. (*Pushing Chang Yun-tung out, centre, back.*)

Liu: Preposterous! This is simply preposterous!

Tai Wei (*turns back and says urgently*): Chief, the new director's here already.

Liu: What! Here?

Tai Wei (*pointing at the slip in Liu Shan-chi's hand*): Look at that! He's left a note for you.

Liu (*hurriedly unfolds the note and reads it aloud*): "To the Chief of the General Administration Office: Please assign the director's office quarters downstairs to the Construction Section, so that it may be used

to store the cement in as before. Also, have the roof of the staff hostel repaired within two days. Chang Yun-tung." . . . Impossible! When did this note come?

Tai Wei: That's what I've been wondering myself.

Liu (*turns to the door, left*): Lao Li! Lao Li! . . . Blast the idiot! Where the hell does he get to when he's needed?

(*Chu Ling enters, centre, back, carrying a jacket and trousers.*)

Chu: Comrade Liu, where's Director Chang?

Liu: Director Chang?

Chu: Yes! He told me just now that I should find him here.

Liu: What? Then why haven't I seen him?

Chu: Haven't you? I'd better go and look for him, I suppose. (*Turns to go.*)

Liu (*barring the way*): Look here, Comrade Chu, do you know the new director?

Chu: I met him just now. Why?

Liu (*hesitantly*): Nothing, I was just wondering.

Chu: What about?

Liu: You see, he left this note. (*Handing the slip to Chu Ling.*)

Chu (*takes the slip and reads it*): That's right. He was rather displeased with the cement being left outside.

Liu: Oh, was he? Did he say anything else?

Chu (*bluntly*): He was very much dissatisfied with you. He said that you were careless of public property, and that you didn't bother about how your comrades had to live. Even when you knew their rooms leaked, you didn't mind, he said.

Liu: But doesn't he realize that it's because of the rules there's no money left this month? It's simply got to be postponed till next month.

Chu: Well, the new director asked how it was then that you could have an office whitewashed, and a

new floor laid? There was room for that in the plan, I suppose! He also wondered how it was that there was plenty of money for sofas and new furnishings!

Liu: What! He even knew I had bought sofas?

Chu: Of course he knew, and he was furious about it, too. He said that things like that shouldn't be charged to the office account, and that you ought to pay for them yourself, and take them home.

Liu: What? Me pay for them? But that's three months' salary!

Chu: Well, if you can afford a sofa set here, won't it look more like a section chief's office? (*She goes out, centre, back, still carrying the clothes.*)

Liu (*holding his head*): I'll be damned! Here's a nice fix! . . . (*To Tai Wei.*) Go and get that contractor back immediately.

(*Tai Wei hurries out, centre, back.*)

Liu (*paces up and down nervously. Suddenly he walks to the telephone and dials*): Hello! Is that the Chien Hsin Furniture Company? I want to speak to your manager. . . . Hello, this is Liu Shan-chi. . . . No, no, I am not rushing you. On the contrary, I am thinking of cancelling that sofa order. . . . What's that? Already on the way? Then call it back at once. . . . What's that? You can't? The truck's already gone quite a while? In that case, order it back when it gets here. . . . Now, look here, we are old friends, aren't we? You must help me out. . . . Certainly, certainly! We'll pay for the transport. (*Hangs up the phone and dials again.*) Hello! Who's that? Oh, Lao Lu! I say, you know that spring bed I bought? I want to cancel it. Our new director is not used to sleeping in a bed with a spring mattress — you know how it is. . . . What's that? It's on its way? Hello! Hello! (*The line is dead.*) Damn it! (*Slams down the receiver, and then presses the bell in a temper.*) Lao Li! Lao Li!

(*Strides to the left door.*) Damn it! Not a soul there!

(*Tai Wei pushes open the front door, and with a great show of politeness, ushers Chang Yun-tung in.*)

Tai Wei: After you, Manager Chang. Please come in and have a chat with us.

(*Chang Yun-tung enters.*)

Liu: Please sit down. (*Holds out a packet of cigarettes.*) Will you smoke?

Chang (*grinning*): No, thanks. I don't smoke.

Liu: Pardon me, I am so forgetful. Your name is. . . .

Tai Wei (*interrupting him*): Chang, Manager Chang.

Liu: Yes, of course. Manager Chang.

Chang: No, I am. . . .

Liu (*hastens to apologize*): We had a slight misunderstanding before, I'm afraid. I hope you didn't mind. (*To Tai Wei.*) You go and keep a sharp lookout at the front gate. When either the bed or the sofas arrive, tell whoever brings them to take them straight back.

Tai Wei: Return them, you mean?

Liu: Yes, return them — the whole lot.

Tai Wei: But. . . .

Liu: But what?

Tai Wei: But the charge for the truck and delivery service. . . .

Liu: Pay them anything they want, but see that you don't accept delivery.

(*Tai Wei hurries, left.*)

Liu: Manager Chang, I am a blunt, outspoken man. I hope you will excuse me for what happened a little while ago.

Chang: Comrade, I did not come here to see to house repairs. I. . . .

Liu: I understand perfectly. You didn't come of your own accord. They sent you here. It really makes no difference one way or the other. You

shall have the business anyway. It won't be much of a contract, but you'll be able to make something out of it.

Chang: But I. . . .

Liu (*hastens to clarify his proposition*): Don't worry! I am an understanding person. Name your price, and we'll pay. The only thing is, it'll be a rush work. It's got to be finished today. Well, it doesn't have to be an awfully solid job, if you know what I mean.

Chang: You mean you'll pay any price, and I can get away with a sloppy job?

Liu (*handing him the note*): Well, see this? That's the way our new director wants it. Repairs to be done in two days, it says. Well, they are orders from above, and orders are orders.

Chang: I see!

Liu: There's one more thing I'd like you to do to oblige me: If the new director happens to speak to you about it, tell him that I asked you to make an estimate some time ago, and that you only started today because you'd been busy.

Chang: Why?

Liu (*heaving a sigh*): For one thing, there are too many people around who like to indulge in foolish talk. The director is new — a complete stranger here. It's quite possible that a piece of gossip or back-biting will reach his ears and give him a wrong impression.

Chang: I see!

Liu: Actually I have nothing to be afraid of. The director and I are old friends. He knows how I do my work.

Chang: Oh! You and the new director are old friends, you say?

Liu: That's right! Really old friends. We fought together as guerrillas, worked in the land reform movement together . . . together always. . . . (*By*

now he has adopted a painfully sentimental tone.) But I haven't seen him for years. He must be getting very old now. (*Sighs.*) He's the nicest fellow except for a strange quirk—he has a strong aversion to private contractors. I advise you, therefore, to keep your distance if you should see him. It'll save you from getting into trouble.

(*Lao Li and Chu Ling enter, left.*)

Lao Li (*to Chu Ling*): See? I *told* you he was here.

Liu (*to Lao Li*): You have been completely invisible all this time. Where the devil have you been?

Lao Li: I went down to give a hand with the cement.

Liu: Give a hand with the cement? What d'you mean?

Lao Li: We've moved it into the director's office.

Liu: What! Who told you to do it?

Lao Li: The new director. Director Chang told us to. He helped, too.

Liu: Oh! The new director's downstairs? Come on, Lao Li, I must go down and meet him. Hurry up! (*Grabs his portfolio from the desk, ready to leave.*)

Chu: Comrade Liu, what ever's the matter with you? The director's sitting right here with you. Why d'you think you've got to look for him?

Liu (*stupefied*): The new director? (*Pointing at Chang Yun-tung.*) Him? Is that. . . . (*His voice fails him.*)

Lao Li: Yes, he is the man you are looking for. That's the new director, Chang Yun-tung.

Liu (*nervously*): I see, I see! So he is. . . . (*To Chang Yun-tung.*) Director! Director Chang! I . . . I am Liu . . . Liu Shan-chi of the General Administration Office.

Chang: H'mmm, it is certainly a privilege to have met you.

Liu: You are flattering me, director. (*To Lao Li.*) Lao Li, what are you waiting for? Go and bring some tea!

Chang: Don't bother, Lao Li. You have worked hard enough with the cement. You must be very tired. You'd better go and have a rest.

Liu: Quite right. Go and rest yourself, Lao Li.

(*Exit Lao Li, left.*)

Chu: Pardon me, director, but you must be careful not to catch cold. You'd better change your clothes.

Chang: I am quite all right, Comrade Chu. I've got used to it. I was going around like this quite often, when Comrade Liu and I were fighting in the guerrilla forces.

Chu: So you two used to fight together in guerrilla forces?

Chang: Didn't we, Comrade Liu?

Liu (*extremely embarrassed*): Yes, but I . . . I . . . eh. . . .

Chang: Now, Comrade Chu, how about the cement? Did you get it all moved?

Chu: Yes, all of it.

Chang: How many bags got wet?

Chu: None.

Chang: You got dozens of people to help you just like that. You did a very good job.

Chu: Thanks to you, though. All I had to say was that the new director himself was moving cement for our section, aren't you going to help, and everybody came at once.

Chang: Why did you say *I* was moving the cement for *your* section? Aren't I part of the Construction Section? I think I've got a share in the cement, too.

Chu: Of course, you're quite right. That cement is government property, and every citizen has a share in it.

Liu: Quite right. Comrade Chu has studied the General Line and has readily acquired a lot of civic sense. The cement is government property. It is clear that everybody has a part in it.

Chu (*dryly*): H'mmm, but you certainly didn't play much part in any of those 300 bags! You yourself didn't seem to want to, either.

Liu (*most uneasy*): Comrade Chu, you . . . you are a little too . . . too. . . .

Chu: Too what? Too critical? Not a bit! Your mind's full up of arrant nonsense from the old days. You knew very well the hostel roof leaked but you never bothered. You also knew that the cement would get wet if it rained, but that meant nothing to you. All you care about is sucking up to your superiors. You've spent the whole of the last few days furnishing the director's office with hangings and curtains and sofas. All you thought about was promotion.

Chang: I am used to sitting on hard benches, you know, (*turning to Liu Shan-chi*) and now you deliberately want to spoil me.

Liu: Well . . . eh, well . . . but that was because . . . eh . . . because the General Administration Office budget could spare a little this month.

Chang: Then why didn't you have the hostel roof repaired as being more important?

Liu: I did mean to. As a matter of fact, I, er, got an estimate. . . .

Chang: It's only because the contractor had been otherwise engaged that the repairing has been postponed again and again until today, I suppose?

Liu (*embarrassed*): Not exactly. What I said to you a short while ago was due to a slight misunderstanding. I hope you don't mind.

Chang: Slight misunderstandings! If they were slight I wouldn't mind, but I've seen too much to call them slight.

Liu: Of course, of course.

(*Lao Li enters, centre, back.*)

Lao Li: Chief, the spring bed's come. Where do you want it put?

Liu (*confused*): The spring bed? . . . Oh, yes! Where is Comrade Tai? Doesn't he know about it?

Lao Li: Comrade Tai is at the front gate, apparently waiting for someone. He's not seen the spring bed because they brought it to the back gate.

Liu: Oh! Very well, then. . . . Tell them to deliver it to my house.

Lao Li (*pointing at the invoice in his hand*): Then, this bill. . . .

Liu: Tell . . . eh . . . tell my wife to pay.

(*Lao Li turns to go.*)

Liu (*calls him back*): Wait! Wait! Tell Comrade Tai to come immediately.

(*Exit Lao Li from the front door.*)

Liu (*hastens to explain to Chang Yun-tung*): The bed . . . eh . . . my wife wanted this bed. She's rather spoilt, I'm afraid!

(*Tai Wei sneaks in, left.*)

Tai Wei (*whispering*): Chief!

Liu (*quickly draws him aside to speak to him in a low voice*): Keep a good look-out at the back door. The sofas will come any minute.

Tai Wei: At the back gate?

Liu: Yes! The back.

Tai Wei: But the front gate. . . .

Liu (*pressingly*): Back gate, back gate. They are using the back gate.

(*Tai Wei scurries off. Lao Li enters, centre, back.*)

Lao Li: Chief!

Liu: What is it?

Lao Li: The sofas have come.

Liu (*embarrassed*): Sofas?

Lao Li: Yes, there's a big one and two small ones.

Liu: Oh, yes! But, then, why didn't Comrade Tai . . .?

Lao Li: You told him to wait at the back gate, and they've just brought the sofas to the front.

Liu (*extremely uneasy*): I see, I see! Very well, then.

Lao Li: Shall I bring them up here?

Liu: No! Let me see . . . let me see. . . .

Chu: It seems to me that the best place your section chief can have them delivered to is his home. His wife's spoilt, he says. She'll like those sofas, I'm sure.

Liu: No, no, not that! As a matter of fact, Comrade Director, I had already arranged for the store to take them back.

Lao Li (*presenting Liu Shan-chi with a bill*): What about the delivery charges. . . .

Liu (*grabs the bill from Lao Li*): All right, all right, give it to me, I'll pay it. Director, please excuse me. I am just going to have a look. I'll be back in a minute.

Chang: Certainly.

(*Exit Liu Shan-chi, flustered, through centre, back.*)

Chang: Comrade Li, you showed a high sense of duty today in salvaging government property. You did a good job and did it courageously. On behalf of all of us here in the Bureau, I want to tell you that we appreciate it. (*Goes to shake hands warmly with Lao Li.*)

Lao Li (*rather abashed*): But . . . but I was only doing my duty. . . . Director, are you starting work today?

Chang: Well, yes! I've already started, I should think!

Lao Li: But what about your office? . . .

Chang: This office will do perfectly well.

Lao Li: Then I'll just move Chief Liu's things back where they were.

Chang: I don't think it's urgent. I rather feel that Comrade Liu will have to be assigned to a more suitable job.

Chu: You mean you're going to. . . .

Chang: I shall have to. It's only my duty to the people, and to him as well.

Lao Li (*takes out the key*): Director, this key. . . .

Chang: Let the Construction Section keep it. But that room is quite big and sunny, and it's just been done up. We shouldn't really keep it for storing cement in. Wouldn't it make better quarters than they've got at present for some of our staff? It can't be worse than they've got now, anyway! We'll repair the roof of the hostel at once, and turn some of it over temporarily, at least, to the Construction Section. Comrade Chu, would that arrangement suit you?

Chu: Suit me? You bet! It's a wonderful idea!

Chang (*jokingly*): Don't go flattering me too soon. It's early days yet. I hope you'll have no cause to call me names again in future.

Chu (*quite embarrassed*): Director, please forgive me . . . I didn't mean you.

Chang: It doesn't matter really. If you do find me making mistakes in the future, I shall expect you to call me even worse names!

Lao Li (*looking out of the window*): The rain's stopped.

(*Chang Yun-tung and Chu Ling walk to the window. Sunlight, streaming through the window, lights up their smiling faces.*)

Chang: Yes, the rain's over, and the sun's shining again.

Chu: Let's open the windows. It's stuffy in here.

Lao Li: That's a good idea. Let's open the windows and have a change of air.

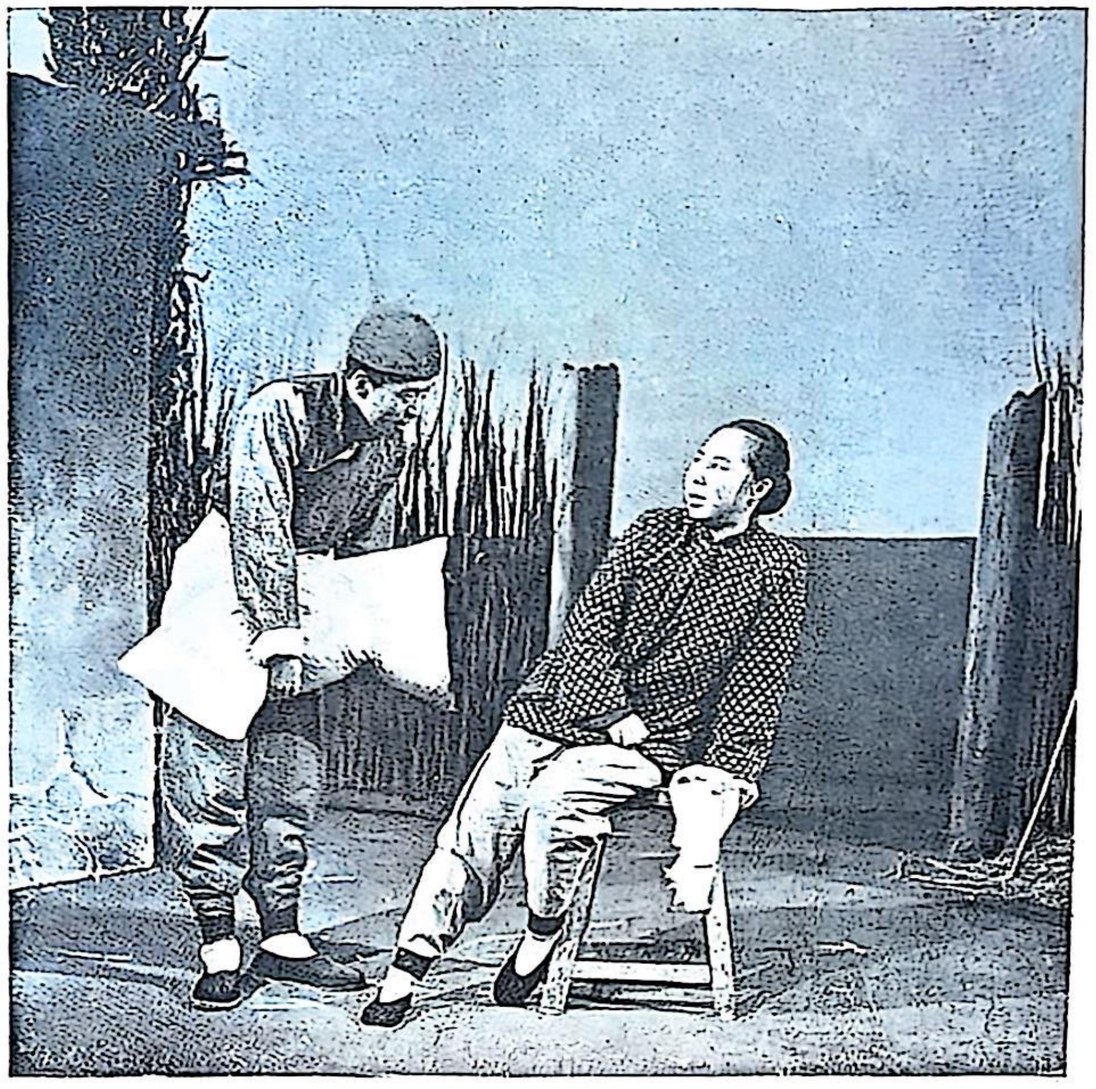
(*Lao Li and Chu Ling throw all the windows open.*)

Chang: That's right. Open all the windows and let out this stagnant, filthy air.
(*The three of them facing the morning sun take a deep breath of fresh air.*)

The curtain falls slowly

Translated by Chung Wei-hsien

China Youth Art Theatre's Production



TWO WAYS OF LOOKING AT IT

CHAO YU-HSIANG

CHARACTERS

Uncle Jen, *the stockman in an agricultural co-operative*
Pien Erh-sao, *one of the women in the co-op*

SCENE

A small peasant compound. Left, a three-roomed cottage. Right, a shed in the same style, used as a storeroom. Back, a low wattle hedge, made of *kaoliang* stalks, with an opening, centre. In front of the cottage is a large willow tree. There are various miscellaneous goods lying around, firewood, stools, rakes, etc.

The curtain rises on an empty stage. After a short pause Uncle Jen comes in through the opening in the hedge. He has an unlighted cigarette in his hand, and looks as though he is wanting a light. He goes over to the cottage and looks in at the window. Seeing no one he turns towards the audience.

Uncle Jen: Nobody in, it seems. . . . (*Pauses and carefully puts the cigarette behind his ear.*) Oh well, I've finished stabling the horses. No point mucking around, I suppose. I might as well do something. (*Goes into the storeroom.*)

(*He is out of sight when Pien Erh-sao, in a working apron, comes out of her cottage door.*)

Pien Erh-sao (*curiously*): I could have sworn that I saw somebody at the window just then! (*She looks*

round but sees nobody, and is about to turn back when she hears a noise. A bit startled, she stands still; she sees someone's shadow in the storeroom and promptly hides behind the willow tree, peeping out so as to keep an eye on the shed.) Whoever it is has no business in that storeroom! What does he think he's doing there by himself at this time of day, when everybody should be working?

(Uncle Jen comes out, carrying a sack of fertilizer. He glances towards the cottage as he goes quickly out of the compound.)

Pien *(dodging round the tree so as to keep out of sight and only coming out when he has gone)*: There he goes with a great sack of something, Heaven knows what! Sneaking off that way as though he's afraid to be seen! *(She begins to wonder what he's been up to.)* I wonder if it was that new fertilizer? *(Runs up to the fence and looks out towards the fields.)* Goodness! It *was* the fertilizer. He's putting it on his own patch! Look at him! *(Comes back to the front of the stage.)* Whatever's all this? Surely he's not taken to stealing! But if he's not pinched it, why should he be putting it on his own plot? Maybe I'm seeing things? *(Trots back to the fence to have another look.)* No, he *is* putting it on his own plot, sure enough, that one by the crooked willow. . . . I dunno . . . perhaps he got permission from the chairman? He may have done that: after all, the chairman's his son-in-law, isn't he? . . . But then why should he behave like a thief? *(She walks over to the shed to have a good look.)* H'm! So he's left the padlock unfastened, has he? He means to come back and get something else, I suppose? *(She stops for a moment's thought.)* He *must* be a thief. It's as clear as day. Stealing, are you, my good man! And look who's caught you at it! Me of all people. What shall I do? Shut my eyes to it? Not me! That fertilizer belongs to the

co-op and what belongs to the co-op is my business, isn't it? *(She whips off her apron.)* I'll have to go and see the chairman about this!

(She puts down her apron, and is just going out of the compound when she sees Uncle Jen coming back. She wants to make sure what he is after, and ducks hastily down where she stands. Uncle Jen comes in without a glance round, goes over straight to the storeroom and undoes the door. While his back is turned, Pien Erh-sao sees her opportunity of getting away, but she hits against a length of wood which is standing against the wall, and knocks it down with a clatter. Uncle Jen jumps.)

Jen: What's that?

Pien *(comes forward, trying to look as though she is quite calm)*: Bother the thing! I was just getting a bit of firewood and that post was right in the way. *(Uncle Jen turns round and walks towards her.)*

Pien *(aside)*: I'll see what he has to say. *(To Uncle Jen.)* Busy, Uncle Jen?

Jen: Yes, keeping going. I can't just hang around.

Pien: I thought you were free when you'd stabled and fed the horses.

Jen: If there's nothing to do that needs doing, I'm free.

Pien: Don't you ever want to rest? I shouldn't have thought. . . . *(She pauses significantly and gives him a look to show she's seen through him.)* I shouldn't have thought what you're doing *is* your job!

Jen: Well, you know what I'm like. I can't bear to have nothing to do, I'd rather be put in prison! But what are you here for? I thought you'd all got to be out on that new irrigation ditch. Why didn't you go?

Pien *(aside)*: Trying to change the subject, the cunning wretch!

Jen *(takes out the cigarette from behind his ear):* Got a light?

Pien (*sarcastically*): Well, I never! Since when have you taken to smoking those expensive packet cigarettes? If you can afford that, I'm all the more surprised at you!... (*She hands him a box of matches and gives him another stern look.*) Really, you know, I should have thought you'd have had enough money for your ... needs....

Jen (*chokes as he draws on his cigarette*): What, me buy these shop cigarettes? Catch me! My nephew came over from the town the other day and left two packets behind him. I reckon they would only get dried if I kept them for him. Anyhow, I don't mind having a puff or two between jobs, but they make me cough — I'm not used to this kind of tobacco. (*Changes the subject casually.*) Where were you a minute ago? I came along to get a light, but I didn't like to come in because there seemed to be nobody in.

Pien: Oh, didn't you? You could perfectly well have come in and helped yourself. (*Sarcastically.*) No one would have suspected *you* of helping yourself to what wasn't yours!

Jen (*coughs again*): I didn't like to, in your house. You're so fussy, you know, and if something happened to be missing afterwards you might have suspected me.

Pien: H'm. People with a clear conscience, they say, don't need to be afraid, even if it's the devil knocking at the door. Who would suspect you, an old progressive, a model worker who the whole of the district respects. (*She looks meaningly at the shed.*) Oh no, *you* wouldn't do such a thing, not on your life! Why, nothing could be more disgraceful....

Jen (*smiling*): I was only teasing. (*He takes out the packet of cigarettes.*) Want a smoke? We seem to be talking nonsense, don't we? (*Holds out a cigarette to her.*)

Pien (*slyly*): They say that if you smoke you must pay for it by coughing, you know!

Jen (*begins to feel that she is getting at him*): What d'you mean, exactly? (*Begins to put the cigarette away.*)

Pien: Exactly what I said. (*Takes the cigarette.*) Thanks. Hadn't you better be getting back to your work? I've got to go over to my sister's to get a pattern for my boy's shoes. (*She shuts her front door and goes out of the compound.*)

Jen (*looking after her, somewhat puzzled*): What on earth was she driving at, I wonder.

(*He stubs his cigarette out and, looking round, goes back into the shed. Pien Erh-sao has not gone far. She has just stopped behind the fence, and now looks cautiously over. Directly she sees that Uncle Jen has gone into the storeroom, she darts in and hides between the willow tree and her house, keeping a sharp eye on the shed.*)

Pien: There you are! I knew it. I was right to suspect him.... When he thought there was nobody about he went straight to the storeroom. It was only when he saw me that there was all that nonsense with his cigarette, and wanting a light. The moment he thought I couldn't see him off he hurried! If that doesn't beat everything!

(*Uncle Jen comes out, carrying a paper packet of something and a hoe, and goes straight out of the compound.*)

Pien (*coming out from behind her tree*): If that isn't the sign of a thief's guilty conscience, I don't know what it is. He already felt it when he had to cough so much; all that going first red and then white! That was when I pinned him down! (*Goes and looks over the fence. She can see Uncle Jen on the plot.*) Well, he has got a nerve! Look what he's taken

this time! The co-op seeds, and he's sowing them in his own patch! (*Turns back.*) Well, well, well! And to think of the way you brag in front of an audience! When the chairman criticizes me, all you do is to play up to him. You're so very strait-laced yourself, aren't you! But you're out of luck this time, I can tell you. Now it's my turn to show what you really are. I bet you wouldn't even show any gratitude if I kept quiet about it! (*Is on the verge of going off to the chairman to tell him all about it but hesitates.*) I don't know if it's any good going to the chairman. After all, he's his father-in-law. Will it do me any good if I do tell him? There's nothing much for me in it if they behave properly, and if they take it badly, he'll only have a grudge against me and make trouble.... I'd better leave it! Let him steal from the co-op. What does it matter to me? My share of what he takes is no bigger than a sesame seed. Why should I go out of my way to make enemies? (*Sits down under the tree.*) Anyway, we've finished sowing; all he's taking are the left-overs. I don't really know why they should lie idle. Would you call it stealing, really, if someone needs the stuff and uses a bit? A bit here and there won't break the co-op. (*Suddenly gets envious.*) Hey! He's not doing badly, is he, with these little presents! (*She has an idea.*) What am I wasting time for! (*Jumping up.*) We're two guests at the same table, aren't we? If he can help himself, so can I. (*Nips out to the hedge, and sees that there is no one about, and comes back.*) Well, haven't we been told in every meeting to follow his example? I'll do just that! The road-builder expects the road to be used, and leaders are there to be followed. (*She looks around, and vanishes into the storeroom, quickly emerging again with a sack of fertilizer.*) Directly it's dark, I'll take this to *my* plot. (*Runs into the cottage to hide the sack; comes out in a moment. She is relieved to find there is still no one about and heaves a sigh of relief.*) Nobody can blame me, anyway. Even if the chairman does get to know about it, what could he say? He can't scold me without first of all criticizing that miserable Jen, and if he can't bring himself to criticize his father-in-law, that's too bad! He'll have to wink at what I do too.... (*A horrid idea dawns upon her.*) There, if I haven't forgotten! I must be out of my mind! My seeds have been in days ago — they're already showing, and fertilizer will do no good now. My old man will never hear of it. (*Half turns to go back to the cottage, but halts.*) I dunno... the more fertilizer the better, they say, don't they? I'll just wait till it's dark, after all.... No, it isn't any good. This stuff is quite strong. It'll burn the seedlings. (*Goes determinedly indoors.*)

(*Uncle Jen, his hoe over his shoulder, enters the compound, heading for the storeroom, just as Pien Erh-sao, carrying the sack of fertilizer, intending to put it back, steps out of her door. She sees Uncle Jen and is just going in again hastily when Jen sees her.*)

Jen: Hey, sister, wait a minute, please....

(*Pien Erh-sao, pretending not to have heard him, turns hastily back, and shuts the door behind her. Uncle Jen hesitates a minute and then goes over to the cottage. The door opens again and Pien Erh-sao comes out, trying to appear perfectly calm.*)

Pien: Hello, Uncle Jen, d'you want a light again?

Jen: No, thanks.

Pien: Anything else on your mind, then?

Jen: Did you notice if anyone has been into the store?

Pien (*slightly startled*): What?... (*Pulls herself together.*) How should I know? I've only just come in from my sister's this minute.

Jen: That's strange! Could there be ghosts in broad daylight?
Pien: Why? What's happened?
Jen: There's a sack of fertilizer missing.
Pien (*aside*): You mean two sacks, don't you? How are you going to get out of that? (*To Uncle Jen.*) Oh yes? And when did you discover that?
Jen: Just now. Somebody must have taken it. It couldn't have sprouted wings and flown away.
Pien: Oh no, of course not. And it couldn't have been made off with by a mouse either.
Jen: Come on, don't you know who took it?
Pien: You bet I do. I saw the person with my own eyes.
Jen: Then what d'you mean, saying you'd only just come back from your sister's?
Pien: It is just one of those things, you know. Sometimes you see something and yet you don't.
Jen: I don't know what you think you're talking about.
Pien: Oh, don't you? You should have some idea of who the person was, I should have thought.
Jen: I'm not a crystal-gazer, am I? How could I know? Why can't you say?
Pien: Well, since you insist, I'll tell you the whole story. But, mind you, if I name the person, I hope you won't....
Jen: For goodness' sake, whatever's the matter with you today? Can't you give a straight answer?
Pien: Don't you think we'd better keep this between ourselves? Telling it far and wide won't bring much honour to either of us. Let's just keep quiet about it and the dust won't spread.
Jen: Whatever do you mean? I don't know what you think you're driving at.
Pien: Oh, don't you? (*Trying to pry out more information.*) Well, tell me, is there only one sack missing?

Jen (*emphatically*): Yes, only one.
Pien: Are you sure?
Jen: Well, I looked just now. (*Turns to go back into the storeroom to check up on it.*)
Pien: There's no need to look again. You'll know what I'm driving at when I tell you that a certain person came here a little while ago, thinking no one had seen him, and made off with one sack. But someone did see him. He forgot that "even a whisper in the bush may reach the ears of a passer-by."
Jen (*worried at all this*): Well, wasn't he stopped?
Pien: Go on! You should know if he was stopped. How much more do you want me to say!
Jen (*still more perturbed*): He got away with it?
Pien (*imagining that she has made herself quite clear*): Naturally. You see, the person who saw him thought that even if the matter were reported to the chairman, nothing would happen to him, so there would be nothing to gain, and the informer would just gain an enemy. Then again, the person who saw him didn't think he was exactly stealing. If you need something, why, you just take it, don't you? And, after all, if you're all members of the same co-op, taking things doesn't matter, does it? If somebody makes a start, why shouldn't others follow him? And so the person who saw him also....
Jen (*interrupting*): Also took a sack of fertilizer, I suppose!
Pien: Exactly! I see you understand me now!
Jen (*indignantly*): I certainly do.
Pien: Well, there you are, then.
Jen: This "certain person" who saw him is a damned rascal, I must say.
Pien: I don't know that the first one is all that much better.
Jen: Why didn't he just grab the first one? To watch him and then make things worse by taking a second sack is terrible.

Pien: Come, come! Why should the first man have a monopoly of the grabbing business?

Jen: If everybody takes a turn at it, that'd be a nice thing, wouldn't it? You grab something, I don't care; I grab something, you don't care. Everybody grabs, nobody cares. There're fifty-two households in our co-op, aren't there? Where should we be at that rate?

Pien: Well, look who started it.

Jen: It's nothing to do with it, who started it. If everyone just follows on the heels of the first one, our new rubber-tyred carts, and our horses, and our new equipment would all go. Before you know where you were, even our land will go! We shan't be left with a tile on our roofs, even!

Pien: Don't let's get away from the man who started it all. He's to blame.

Jen: Why do you keep on about him?

Pien: Are you trying to tell me he has a right to take what he wants?

Jen: No, of course I'm not.

Pien: All right! Then you can't simply make all that fuss about anyone for following his example.

Jen: I'm not doing that. The person who saw him should have tried to talk the first one out of it, and tell him where he's wrong. If that didn't work, he should have brought the matter up at a meeting of all the members, so that we could all help him and educate him.... That's the only way, through mutual supervision and mutual responsibility, I mean, and with the understanding that we've got a common interest in our common property, for our co-op to accumulate capital. We have to build up capital the way the swallows build their nests bit by bit, bigger and bigger.

Pien: I don't believe you understand me, after all.

Jen: I understand all right! That's the trouble with our co-op. I don't know how it came about, but half

our members don't care a hang about people taking co-op property. They let people go round simply helping themselves, and never care about it. They don't seem to realize that if a thing belongs to the co-op, no individual has the right to it, not even a little thing like a grain of rice. None of it's personal property. To take it is nothing more nor less than stealing. . . . It's a question of principle — you understand it as well as I do, so I needn't go on about it any more. The thing I want to know is who these two people you're talking about are. Come on, tell me!

Pien (*sceptically*): The way you talk, you sound as though you had no personal share in it! Haven't you any sense of shame?

Jen: Oh! . . . We mustn't wash our dirty linen in public, is that what you mean? Look, there's only you and me here, both members. (*Looking about him.*) There're no outsiders here. Now tell me.

Pien: 'Some opera singers haven't got much voice, it seems, but they certainly know how to act!

Jen (*irritated*): Don't try to be funny. You. . . .

Pien (*looking him full in the face, and interrupting*). Don't pretend! You know who the first man was who took the fertilizer. You know you did it. Acting like an innocent lamb! As if I didn't know!

Jen (*completely taken aback*): What on earth are you talking about! Whatever do you mean?

Pien (*still very sarcastic*): Aren't some people strange! Their right hands don't know what their left do, I suppose? They talk like angels, but they daren't look themselves in the face in the glass. (*She puts on an outraged air, and sweeps off to the cottage.*)

Jen (*realizing what she has been getting at*): Oh, that's it, is it? No wonder she was beating about the bush like that. What a fool I was not to understand! (*Bursts into a guffaw.*) But who's the second

person? (*Pauses for a moment.*) H'm, I reckon there's only one person who it can be.... (*Looks over towards the cottage.*) Pien Erh-sao, we haven't finished our talk yet. (*Goes over to the front door.*)

Pien (*must have kept an eye out of the window, for she comes out immediately*): Have you got something more to say?

Jen: Look, I grant you that you know the first person who took that sack of fertilizer, but who is the second person?

Pien: Thank you for granting me that, I'm sure. Why, you even took some seeds....

Jen: All right, all right, I did; I'm not talking about that.

Pien (*thinks it best to adopt a conciliatory tone, so that she herself doesn't get into trouble*): Uncle Jen, as your niece by marriage I certainly have no intention of wanting to embarrass you. I would never have said anything if you hadn't forced me to. But there's no need for you to worry. As long as you don't give yourself away, rest assured that I won't. We have no grudge against each other, have we? Nor are there any old scores for us to settle. One good turn deserves another, doesn't it? Surely we can agree on that, and leave the rest.

Jen: Of course, I can agree, but you....

Pien (*anxious to close the matter*): Let's leave it then. If you bear me no grudge, I'm willing to forget it for my part. Well, I really must go over to my sister's and get those shoe patterns.... (*Turns to go into the house.*)

Jen: But you haven't said who the second person is.

Pien: For goodness' sake, can't we forget it now? It is lucky for you that it is I who know about it, because I shan't make harm, I promise you. Don't make me go on; it'll only lead to trouble. You'd

much better get back to your work, and let me get on with mine.

Jen (*uncompromisingly*): Oh no, you don't.

Pien: Now what do you want? Afraid that I won't keep my word, and that I'll let you down after all? You're afraid of losing face completely, and want a scapegoat to take the blame, do you? You needn't worry, I tell you. Just let's forget all about it.

Jen: No, I shan't leave it at that. What I did with the fertilizer was one thing. I can tell you about it when we've dealt with the other, or I can appear before a members' meeting, if you want me to. What I'm going to do now is talk about the person who took the second bag. (*It is his turn to look at her meaningly.*)

Pien (*considerably shaken*): What are you looking at me like that for? I'm sure I was never one to touch a thing that wasn't mine.

Jen (*drily*): You know what they say about people who confess before they're accused.

Pien: But I don't know what you're talking about. I wouldn't recognize what fertilizer is even if it was in front of me!

Jen (*easily sees through this*): No need to be afraid of cold water if you've got a strong digestion, is there? If it wasn't you, tell me who it was. (*Sharply.*) Come on, now!

Pien (*feels trapped but tries still to escape*): All right, I'll tell all right, but not to you. If you insist on me saying, come and see the chairman with me. (*Threateningly.*) You may not like it. I'll tell everything, I promise you.

Jen (*a little hesitant but decides to call her bluff*): Very well, if you prefer to talk to the chairman, so much the better. (*Turns and goes right out of the compound.*)

Pien (*very muddled now*): What a funny chap he is! Perhaps he wasn't stealing after all? But I saw

him sow the seeds in his own plot! (*Pulls herself together.*) Anyway, you can't prove theft unless you find the stolen goods. You'll not catch me red-handed, I can tell you. I'll get rid of the stuff! Then we'll see what the chairman can do when he comes.... (*Rushes back into the house and comes out with the sack of fertilizer. She means to put it back in the storeroom, but finds to her horror that it is padlocked and the key has gone.*) Oh heavens! When did he lock the door? (*She looks frantically round.*) I know! I'll dump it in the pigsty before anybody comes. (*She runs to the hedge, but screams as she finds herself confronted by Uncle Jen, who has hidden himself in the same place as she did.*)

Jen (*tauntingly*): So you're this "other person"! Who would have thought it!

Pien (*dropping the sack, and hanging her head*): Oh, Uncle Jen, let us remember that never in our life have we stepped on one another's toes.

Jen: That's what you said before, I think ... we've got no grudge against one another, nor are there any old scores between us to settle. But there's something else, too. What about "catching a thief with the stolen goods"? I'll have to do something about this, I'm afraid.

Pien (*pleadingly*): Oh, Uncle Jen, you stole too, didn't you? Oh, what a slip of the tongue! I don't mean steal, I mean borrow or use, of course. You had a sack, too, didn't you? I saw you putting it on your own plot. But I swear by Heaven, I promise solemnly, that I'll never tell on you. I'll put this sack back. Give me the key, please!

Jen: I'm not ready to do that yet.

Pien: What more do you want me? Kowtow? Even a convicted criminal about to be beheaded can't be made to do more than bow his head to the ground. (*She sees that he is unmoved, and really lets go.*) You won't give me the key? All right! You've

only yourself to thank if it comes to a fight. We'll see who's got the most to worry about. And let me tell you it'll be no use trying to fall back on the fact that the chairman's your son-in-law. If I'm to be shown as dirty, you won't come out so clean either. We're the same as two locusts tied to one string — I can't get away, but neither can you. Go ahead and tell the chairman if that's what you want! They can't make me face a firing squad just because I wanted to use a bit of fertilizer that belongs to the co-op!

Jen: Look here, let's get all this straight. As far as I'm concerned I've not stolen, or borrowed, or used, or anything else you want to call it, from the co-op.

Pien: You don't say! What were you doing with the fertilizer and the seeds, may I ask?

Jen: I was sowing seeds for the co-op.

Pien (*sneeringly*): I see! You're the stockman, but you do a bit of sowing for the co-op too, do you? Quite the model worker, I must say.

Jen: You know yourself that the other members went to dig the new irrigation ditch when they'd finished sowing. When I'd fed the horses my actual job was finished but I decided I ought to do something about the co-op's vegetable plot which certainly shouldn't be allowed to lie waste....

Pien: What a lie! The co-op's vegetable plot, indeed! You put that fertilizer on your own plot!

Jen: I beg your pardon. That's the co-op's plot.

Pien: Who d'you think you're fooling? You know very well I'm not a visitor! The co-op's vegetable plot is behind here, alongside Liu Shen's. D'you think I don't know that it's your plot over there? Where did I see you sowing just now, tell me! — behind this compound or over there? D'you think I am blind?

Jen: All this only goes to show that you didn't attend the last meeting — the meeting last night. You didn't, did you?

Pien: My husband went. D'you think everyone in every household's got to go every time you want to call a meeting? I can see what you're trying to do — you're just changing the subject by this talk about attending meetings, to cover up your sins.

Jen: Nothing of the sort. You've only yourself to blame for all this. If you'd gone to the meeting you'd have known that I'm exchanging my house for the co-op office.

Pien (*quite unbelieving*): Changed houses?

Jen: That's right. Not only houses but also the plots.

Pien (*surprised*): I just don't believe you.

Jen: You know very well I don't tell lies. There were thirty-six households in the co-op last year, and this year we've got fifty-two. In this compound, you've got half the rooms, and the co-op's got the rest. But these rooms won't be big enough this year, with this increased membership.

Pien: Last I heard of it was that we were going to build a five-roomed house this year for the co-op.

Jen: That was the original plan. But at the meeting last night we decided not to spend any money on new buildings at the moment, quite apart from the fact that we haven't got the manpower to spare. Then somebody said that the place I'm in has got three rooms and would do well for the co-op office. The Party gave me that house, you know, and I thought that if it was to the benefit of the co-op, of course I'd agree to the change. It'll be good all round, and save money. At the same time I said I'd swap plots, too.

Pien (*quite deflated*): Is that all true? Why didn't you say it before?

Jen: You didn't tell me much before, either.

Pien: I still don't understand why you had to sneak in here as though you were afraid of being seen.

Jen: I wasn't afraid — that's a reflection of your own mind. You'd even suspect the shadow of a tree.

Pien (*feeling herself beaten on every point*): Oh dear, oh dear! Uncle Jen, we'll be next-door neighbours now. Can't we drop the whole matter? Please don't mention it to the chairman, I beg you.... I...I know I'm in the wrong....

Jen (*very seriously*): Don't you think you'd better tell all about it yourself, at the next meeting?

Pien: What! Make me discredit myself in public? (*Pleadingly.*) Oh, Uncle Jen, you can't expect anyone to push his child into the well. Can't you let it go?

Jen: This isn't a thing that concerns you only. It'll be a very good thing for everyone to think about, and make us all realize the difference between our own and the co-op's property.

Pien (*quite defeated*): All right. I did do it and it was my mistake. Well, as you make your bed, so you must lie upon it. I'll go and speak up.... (*Repentantly.*) I must have gone out of my mind! (*Runs into her house in a flurry.*)

Jen (*calling after her*): It isn't that you've gone out of your mind. It's rather that you had two minds, and there were two ways of looking at it — one for co-op affairs, and the other for your own. (*He picks up the sack of fertilizer, unlocks the storeroom and puts it in.*)

The curtain falls

Translated by Tsung Wei-hsien

HOME - COMING

LU YEN-CHOU

CHARACTERS

Tung Hui-yun, *leader of the women's group in an agricultural producers' co-operative. She is thirty-two*

Wang Piao, *her husband, vice-manager of a branch state department store in a neighbouring province, aged thirty-four*

Hsiao-tsui, *their ten-year-old daughter*

Granny Wang, *Wang Piao's mother*

Tung Hui-fen, *Hui-yun's sister, a young school teacher in her early twenties*

Wang Chih-hua, *her husband, a young farmer about her age. Vice-chairman of the co-op and a model farmer. He is related to Wang Piao's family — perhaps a cousin. At any rate he uses the familiar greetings, and is regarded by Granny Wang as being one of the family*

Li Teh-yu, *the chairman of the co-op*

Co-op Members A, B and C

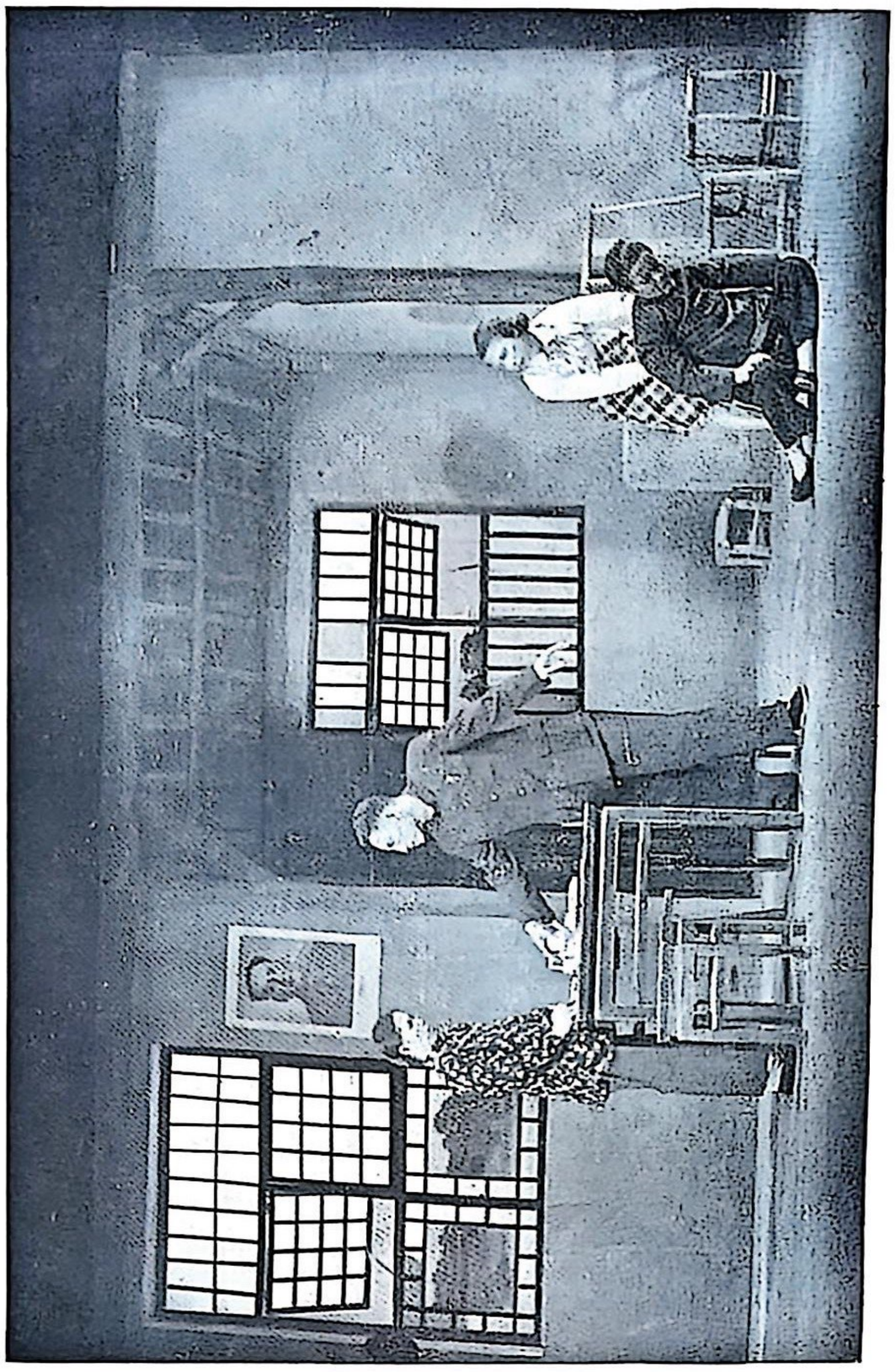
Neighbours A, B . . . etc.

TIME

The Present

Action takes place in a peasant home in China. The room is simply furnished but very clean and tidy. On the wall facing the audience is a portrait of Chairman Mao and a pair of scrolls. Against the wall is a side table on which are sundry articles and a neatly arranged stack of books. In the middle of the room is a much bat-

Peking People's Art Theatre's Production



tered teak table and several benches. There are a tea pot and cups on the table. A bamboo chair and two stools stand L. There is a mending basket on one—evidently the housewife's sewing corner. Posters of farming techniques cover the L wall. R is a large photograph of Wang Piao. Someone has stuck the symbol of faithful married love, a red paper scissor cut of a mandarin duck and drake, on to the photograph.

It is about noon. The sun which brightens the room lends a particularly cosy and warm atmosphere to the little house. The stage is empty of people when the curtain rises, then Tung Hui-fen appears with Hsiao-tsui. Hui-fen is simply dressed in a blouse and skirt, but her cheerful smiling face has a special charm. She is carrying Hsiao-tsui's satchel. The child dashes exuberantly into the inner room.

Hsiao-tsui (*shouting*): Mum, mum! I'm back from school.

Fen (*hanging up the satchel for the little girl*): Hsiao-tsui, your mum's not back yet.

Hsiao-tsui (*coming out with a notebook*): Auntie!

Fen (*gently*): No, Hsiao-tsui, remember to call me teacher like everyone else.

Hsiao-tsui (*a little shy*): Teacher.

Fen: What have you got there? A new exercise book your mum bought you?

Hsiao-tsui: No—mine's red. This one is mum's.

Fen: Your mum's? Let me have a look.

Hsiao-tsui: Mum writes in it every night. Aunt... (*correcting herself*) I mean teacher, don't you think mum writes awfully well?

Fen (*looking at the exercises, says to herself*): Really, Sister Yun's....

Hsiao-tsui: Tell me, teacher, do you think my mum can be a teacher too in a couple of years?

Fen (*hugging the child*): Yes, Hsiao-tsui, I think she can. Look how well she writes.

Hsiao-tsui: Why does mum have to start to learn reading and writing when she's so old?

Fen: In the old days, my child, the landlords and their gangs made it impossible for poor folk like us to learn anything. Your mum was poor and she couldn't afford to study. (*In a schoolmistressy way.*) Don't you see?

Hsiao-tsui (*not fully comprehending*): M'm, yes.

Fen (*pointing to the picture of Wang Piao*): Hsiao-tsui, do you miss your dad?

Hsiao-tsui: Yes. Mum's always saying when dad comes home he'll bring me a fountain pen and a real drum. But he *never* comes home! Tell me, teacher, why doesn't he come to see mum and granny and me?

Fen: Silly girl! Your dad's very busy serving the people. Look (*producing a letter from her pocket*), here's a letter from him.

Hsiao-tsui (*clasping the letter*): A letter from dad, a letter! I must find mum.

Fen: Be careful you don't lose it then, dear!

Hsiao-tsui: I'll be careful. (*Exit.*)

Fen (*gazing at Wang's picture*): If only he'd come back for a visit! It'd make Sister Yun so happy. It must be at least four years now he's been away. (*Wang Chih-hua comes in. His shirt is open and he looks as though he has come straight from field work. He tiptoes up to Hui-fen, behind her back.*)

Chih-hua: Hi! So school's out.

Fen (*startled*): Oops! (*Turning round.*) Naughty man! (*Chidingly.*) We're not at home, love. You'll make us a laughing-stock!

Chih-hua: Why should they laugh? We're an old married couple now. There's no need for us to mind what people say.

Fen: Oh, you! (*A pause.*) Let's go home. I haven't done a thing about food yet.

Chih-hua: I saw that school was out, but when I went home you weren't there. I guessed you'd have come here.

Fen: People *will* laugh at you and tease if they find out that you go round looking for your wife as soon as you get home.

Chih-hua: People will only envy me my happiness. They won't tease.

Fen: Do up your shirt, dear, you'll catch cold.

Chih-hua (*docilely*): What's for dinner today, Fen?

Fen: Well, I thought I'd heat up a bit of ham and fry some vegetables. Will that be enough, d'you think?

Chih-hua: No, I don't! We should have an egg soup.

Fen: Why?

Chih-hua: All expectant mothers have....

Fen: Hush! What ever's come over you today? Why do you keep on being funny?

Chih-hua: I'm not being funny. You see, Fen, when I'm with you my heart fills with joy. (*Pause.*) I can't get over it still. An ordinary ignorant peasant like me gets a wife like you, a teacher....

Fen: I won't let you say that. There's nothing the matter with being a peasant, and anyway you're the vice-chairman of the co-op and a model farmer.

Chih-hua: That's enough compliments for me. Come on, let's go home, my own teacher.

Fen: I wonder why Sister Yun isn't back yet.

Chih-hua: Her brigade has challenged the first brigade.

Fen: Sister's really remarkable.

Chih-hua (*seriously and no longer joking*): Yes, she did a lot for the co-op during the spring ploughing. She's really a most essential member.

Fen (*showing him the exercise book*): Look at the way she has been studying every evening, unbeknown to any of us! As far as that goes, she's much better than you.

Chih-hua: Well, I've not kept my pen exactly idle in the evenings, either. (*He looks through the exercise book.*)

Fen: Yes, but I had to keep you at it all the time. She does it of her own accord.

Chih-hua (*thoughtfully*): I suppose she wants to keep up with him. And then, of course, being a brigade leader she's just got to learn. In other words she's studying because she really wants to.

Fen (*lowering her voice*): Listen, there's a letter from my brother-in-law.

Chih-hua: A letter? Where?

Fen: Hsiao-tsui's taken it. Honestly Chih-hua, why ever doesn't he come home, if only for a few days?

Chih-hua: He's not like you women. You want your man to come home every night. He's a vice-manager . . . and his work. . . .

Fen: What's that you said about women? What are you saying about us?

Chih-hua: This. . . .

(*Hsiao-tsui comes in with her grandmother in tow.*)

Hsiao-tsui: Here's teacher, granny, like I said. (*To Fen.*) Granny wants you to read the letter.

Granny (*handing Fen the letter*): Will you read the letter, Hui-fen? Hsiao-tsui's been longing so for her daddy. And he just doesn't come back.

Chih-hua: His work. . . .

Granny: You're always saying he's busy with his work. He's too busy if you ask me. (*To Fen.*) Will you read the letter for us, dear? Stay and eat with us today, won't you? You know, my boy hasn't written for over six months.

Chih-hua: Elder brother's a vice-manager, aunt, he hasn't got much time for such things.

Granny (*obviously very pleased but trying to conceal it*): I don't need you to tell me! But when he comes back I'll mind and tell him how you've stood up for him and how you always defend him. Now, read the letter for us, Hui-fen.

Chih-hua: Yes, do, and see if there's any word for me.

Granny: Come on, Hui-fen, get on with the reading. (*To Chih-hua.*) There's sure to be something for you. He won't forget.

Fen (*reading*): Dearest mother, I'll be home on the fifteenth of this month. I mean to take you back to the city with me. We'll discuss everything when I see you. (*Stops.*)

Granny: Coming home! Oh! . . . (*so happy that she is flustered*) Hsiao-tsui, your dad's coming home. What's today?

Fen: The fifteenth.

Granny: The fifteenth! My goodness, then he'll be home any minute! (*Begins to bustle about.*)

Fen (*in an undertone to her husband*): Why d'you think there's not a single word for Sister Yun?

Chih-hua: Perhaps it's because he's coming back and can say a thousand things to her himself. There was no mention of me either.

Fen (*thinking perhaps she has been over-sensitive*): Anyway, he's coming home at last. Hsiao-tsui, aren't you glad your dad's coming?

Hsiao-tsui (*skipping up and down joyously*): Daddy's coming home!

Granny: Heavens! (*Grumbling happily.*) Why couldn't he have written earlier? Oh dear, and we've let the chickens run loose. T'ck! T'ck! There he is, a vice-manager now, but he still doesn't plan the things out the way he should.

Chih-hua: He's got his work to consider. Perhaps he decided to come on the spur of the moment.

Granny: There you go! Of course it's his work again.

Chih-hua (*with heartfelt pleasure*): When he's back this time there's a load of things I want his advice on. He's seen the world and he'll know a great deal about the experience of other good co-ops. (*To Fen.*) Fen, you can talk to him about problems in teaching too. He knows everything. He has studied a lot and fought as a guerrilla.

Fen: All right, all right, I know! Look at you! Fairly daft with joy!

Granny: Here, you two newly-weds, you'll have to have your chattering later. Go and fetch Hui-yun home for me, can you? (*Lowering her voice.*) You don't know, but Hui-yun has been worrying for fear she can't keep pace with Piao. She's been studying hard every night; learning to read and write. (*Sighs.*) Oh well, it'll turn out all right now he's coming home. It's too bad that a young couple like them should have to be separated for years. Ai! (*To Fen.*) You and your sister Yun are both good girls, but your life has been much happier than hers. She never complains, but in her heart. . . . Goodness, there I go again. This time, we'll keep him home for a good long spell. He wants to take me back with him, does he? I'm not going. The city's no place for an old countrywoman like me! It'd be better if he were to take Hsiao-tsui and her mum to the city when the busy season here's over. Young people should go out and see something of the world. I'm getting on in years, and I'm sure I don't want to. What's the matter with the life here in the village? It's all right for me.

(*Tung Hui-yun comes in. She looks younger than her thirty-two years, with her delicate prettiness, her fresh colouring and her prettily arched eyebrows. She has just come in from the fields and is still radiant with the joy of rewarding work. With her are two other members of the co-op.*)

Yun (*to the other two*): . . . We won't lose. Hurry home now and get on with your meal, and let's get back to work as soon as we can. We'll be able to finish by dusk, and then we can go and help the other brigade.

Hsiao-tsui (*running up to her*): Mum, my dad. . . .

Yun (*not hearing her*): But don't let's tell them that we're going to come and help them, though.

Co-op Member A: No fear! We won't breathe a word.

Co-op Member B: We'll just suddenly turn up in their field and shout out together, "We've come to help you!" That'll surprise them!

Yun (*smiling*): I don't think that's a good way. We don't want to show off, do we? That'll make them embarrassed, and put them off.

Hsiao-tsui: Mum!

Yun: Just a second, dear.

Granny: You ought to listen to Hsiao-tsui. She's got good news for you.

Fen: Her dad's coming home.

Yun: Dear sister, that's not very funny for me!

Chih-hua: No, really, we're not teasing you. He's coming home today.

Granny: See, here's his letter.

(*Yun reads the letter.*)

Co-op Members A and B (*with pleasure*): What! Wang Piao coming back?

Co-op Member B: That'll make her happy!

Yun (*inwardly much excited, but trying to appear calm*): Oh! I haven't really been thinking about him all that much.

Co-op Member B: Go on! Don't try to tell us you haven't.

Granny: Imagine it! He'll be here any moment.

Chih-hua (*gets up*): We'd better be going so that they can get ready for the home-coming.

Yun (*laughing*): Don't hurry away. There's nothing to get ready. If he's coming, he's coming, that's all.

Fen: Oh, don't pretend so, Sister Yun.

Yun: Silly girl!

Chih-hua: I bet she's really wild with joy.

Granny: You people run along now, do.

(*The others leave but Fen returns.*)

Fen: Sister Yun, call me when he's here, will you?

Chih-hua (*dashing in after her*): My own teacher, do come on home and start lunch.

Fen: How you do fuss. (*Exit with Chih-hua.*)
Granny: What a devoted young couple they are! They seem as happy as the gods.
Yun (*absently*): Yes, they do, don't they?
Granny: At first I was afraid they wouldn't get along, seeing she's educated and he's only an ordinary peasant. I was afraid that after the first flush of love Hui-fen might feel that he was below her. But as it turns out they're getting along beautifully. How times have changed! People have changed with them.
Yun (*to herself, happily*): Yes, our outlook has changed.
Hsiao-tsui: Mum, can't we eat now, and then go and meet daddy?
Granny (*to Yun*): I'll see to the meal. You have a wash and change into something pretty.
Yun (*shyly*): Mother, I'll have to go back to the fields this afternoon.
Granny: Stuff and nonsense! I'll go and ask for leave for you. Hsiao-tsui, now you be a good child and wait for your daddy to come before we eat.
Hsiao-tsui: All right, granny.
Granny (*to Yun*): I'm going to the co-op chairman to ask for leave for you.
Yun (*trying to stop her*): No, don't, mother.
Granny: Why ever not? Now, you see that you tidy up and make yourself pretty. (*Exit.*)
Hsiao-tsui (*airily*): Granny said you are to change, mummy, I'll get your clothes out for you.
Yun: Hsiao-tsui! (*Tries to stop her daughter, fails and says to herself.*) Coming back! He's coming back.

(*Hsiao-tsui re-enters with a new gaily-printed cotton jacket and a flower.*)

Hsiao-tsui: Here you are, mummy!
Yun (*taking the jacket*): Silly little one! D'you really want mummy to wear a flower?

Hsiao-tsui: Yes, of course! You must wear it.
Yun (*puts her arm into one sleeve but pulls it out again. Hugging her daughter*): Oh, Hsiao-tsui!
Hsiao-tsui: Oh, mummy. (*She gently puts the flower into her mother's hair.*)
Yun: No, don't. (*Pulls the flower off and puts it back into the basket.*)
Hsiao-tsui: I'll tell granny on you. You're not doing what she told you.
Yun (*smiling tenderly*): Silly girl! (*Picks up the flower and puts it into Hsiao-tsui's hair.*) Hsiao-tsui, are you glad your daddy's coming home?
Hsiao-tsui: Are you?
Yun: No, mum's not a bit glad.
Hsiao-tsui: You're pretending, pretending.
Yun (*kissing her daughter*): Oh, Hsiao-tsui.
Hsiao-tsui: Mummy!
Yun: Daddy'll be home right away.
Hsiao-tsui: D'you think he'll bring me a pen and a real drum?
Yun: I'm sure he will. He loves you.
Hsiao-tsui: What's daddy like?
Yun: He's got a squarish face.
Hsiao-tsui (*continuing for her*): And broad shoulders
Yun: How ever d'you know, child?
Hsiao-tsui: You always tell me that when I ask! How long d'you think daddy'll stay, mum? (*Pause.*) Tell me.
Yun: A long, long time.
Hsiao-tsui: Does daddy love you?
Yun: You guess.
Granny (*coming in*): Goodness, are you two just chattering? Why haven't you changed? I've got leave for you.
Yun: Oh, mother! Why did you do that?
Granny (*ignoring her*): Hsiao-tsui, let's go and catch a chicken.
Hsiao-tsui: Yes, let's.

Yun: I'll come too. (*They go out together. There is a scuffle offstage, and then Hsiao-tsui's voice is heard "Got it!" They come back.*) Mother, where's the meat-chopper?

Hsiao-tsui: I'll get it. (*Exit.*)

Granny: All right, dear, you get it, but be careful. Now, daughter-in-law, you must give him more of your attention when he's home this time. He's so seldom here!

Yun (*in a low voice*): Mother!

Granny (*her voice shows the depth of her feeling*): Hui-yun, I want you to know that I feel deeply in your debt. You've been a very good daughter-in-law to me. You've done all you should and worked so hard. You are indispensable both to the co-op and your family. When my son comes back, I'll tell him to thank you properly.

Yun (*laughing*): Mother, you talk as if I'm an outsider.

Granny (*affectionately*): No, you're closer to me than if you were my own daughter. (*Picking up the new jacket.*) Come on! Put this on.

Yun: But it makes me feel so silly!

Granny: There's nothing silly about it, child! Whoever would laugh at you for dressing up a little? (*Pause.*) I know my boy. Ever since he was a child he liked to have everything just so. You must remember that although he's as country-born as anyone, and only had a few years' schooling he's been around a lot since and he's seen quite a bit of the outside world. We mustn't be too countrified; we don't want him to feel ashamed of us.

Yun: He won't feel that way. He's a Party member.

Granny (*severely*): You'd better listen to what I say, dear.

Yun (*hesitating*): Mother, how can I go to work in these clothes? Today, our brigade challenged the

first brigade, and I'm the brigade leader . . . how. . . .

Granny: Didn't I tell you I'd got leave for you? Come on, put it on.

Yun (*puts the jacket over her shoulders. Hsiao-tsui comes in with the knife*): I'll go and kill the chicken.

Granny: No, I'll do it. Now you calm down, and make yourself pretty and then go and take Hsiao-tsui to meet him.

(*Li Teh-yu comes in. He is a bearded old man in his late fifties, but is still energetic and full of life. He is naturally kind and full of humour, but he can be very strict on questions of principle.*)

Yun: Ah, here's our chairman.

Li (*bowing, his hands together in the proper old way*): Congratulations, congratulations!

Granny: Aren't you glad my Piao's coming back?

Li: Of course I'm glad. (*Sits down.*) He should have come back for a visit long ago. He ought to see how nice his home is now, how well our co-op is getting along and how well his wife is doing. If I were him and saw all these changes at home wouldn't I jump for joy?

Granny (*smiling*): Well, it's thanks to your good leadership.

Li: Don't flatter me, sister. Thanks are due to everyone who worked towards it. All I did was to say a few words here and there.

Yun: Chairman, the second brigade. . . .

Li: Never mind about that now! You're not to think about the first or second brigade today! You'll kindly stay at home for me now, I hope.

Granny: I'm glad to hear you say that! I told her I've got leave from you for her to stay home, but she's still fussing about it.

Li: Is she, indeed! She'll have to obey the chairman's orders, though.

Yun: But. . . .

Li: No buts, now. You're simply not allowed to go to work this afternoon. If you still feel uneasy about it, you talk it over with your husband and ask him for his criticism and advice for the co-op. That'll be doing your job, and we'll count that as good work.

Yun (*blushing*): How you do talk, uncle!

Li (*laughing*): That's because I'm so pleased for you. (*Calms down.*) To tell the truth, I've been dying to see him myself as soon as I heard he was coming. There's so much to discuss with him. He is, after all, practically a veteran revolutionary. He'll be able to give us a lot of help.

Granny: You all think so highly of him.

Voices (*offstage*): Aunty Wang, Aunty Wang. Come out to welcome your son.
This is your gate.
These houses are newly built.

Granny (*much flustered*): Aiya! Here he is! (*Exit.*)

Hsiao-tsui: Daddy! (*Rushes out.*)

Li: Here he comes. (*Exit.*)

Yun (*rather shaken and at a loss*): He's coming. He's come back! (*Hurriedly puts on her new jacket and runs inside.*)

(*Wang Piao enters with his mother, Chairman Li and neighbours. There is a gabble of excited conversation. In the confusion he cannot be clearly seen until the crowd settles down slightly. He wears a government worker's blue serge suit, and looks well-fed and citified. However, despite his smart and clever appearance, he does not seem quite likable, but it is difficult to say just what is the matter. Somehow his gloss is neither entirely superficial, nor really cultured and wise. He seems to be nervous about something and his answers to the people round him are offhand.*)

Wang: Sit down, everyone! Well, how are things going? The land keeps you busy, I suppose. Anyone want to smoke?

Co-op Member A: Yes, the land is a great call. We've got a high production task to fulfil, you know.

Wang: M'm. (*To Li politely.*) Uncle, you look just the same, as full of life as ever.

Li: Thanks, my boy! (*Pulls himself up with a laugh.*) Listen to me, still calling you "my boy"! You, a man with a big job now. We've all been looking forward to having you back for a visit; we want you to give us your frank criticisms of our work. I must say you look different now. You've gained weight, I think, and your skin's not so sunburnt as it was.

Granny: I kept hearing so much about how busy you were that I thought you'd be bound to be fairly worn out.

Wang: I've been kept rather busy, that's true, but we eat well you know. (*Gives an important laugh.*)

Granny: You know what they say: "A mother's heart's never at ease, when a son travels a thousand *li*." Why have you never been back once in four years?

Wang: Too much work to do. I wanted to come back, of course, but I just couldn't manage it. Being in a leading position isn't all that simple. I have to go here, there and everywhere. When I go back this time, I've got to go to Peking.

All: Go to Peking!

Hsiao-tsui: Daddy's going to Peking! Granny, teacher says Peking is simply wonderful.

Granny (*happily*): That's lovely, dear. We'll get daddy to take you to Peking some day. (*To her son.*) See how big your daughter's grown. (*To Hsiao-tsui.*) Greet your daddy properly, dear.

Hsiao-tsui (*shyly*): Daddy! (*Runs to the other side of the room.*)

Neighbour B: Hsiao-tsui, has your daddy given you your fountain pen and the books you wanted?

Hsiao-tsui (*to Granny*): Granny, can I. . . .

Granny: Ask your daddy for them.

Hsiao-tsui: Dad, I. . . .

Wang (*embarrassed*): Oh dear, I forgot to buy them. . . .

Granny: Well! You haven't been back for years and years, and when you do come you don't bring a thing for the child.

Wang: Come here, Hsiao-tsui! (*Brings out some money.*) Get someone to buy you what you want.

Granny (*to Hsiao-tsui*): Take it, dear.

The Neighbours: It's a present from your father. Don't be shy. Take it! (*Hsiao-tsui takes the money and runs inside.*)

Li: Where's Hui-yun? Why isn't she here to welcome such an important visitor?

Neighbour Women A and B: She's shy! Come on, let's go and fetch her out.

(*They go into the inner room.*)

Granny (*to neighbours*): Make yourselves at home. I must go and see to the meal, if you'll excuse me! (*Exit.*)

Li (*to Wang*): It's several years since you've been back, my boy. Your wife has made tremendous progress.

Neighbour C: She studies every evening.

Neighbour D: She's a brigade leader now.

Neighbour Woman E: She is the leader of our women's group, too.

Yun (*comes in with hot water in a basin*): Oh! D'you want to wash?

Wang: Thank you.

Neighbour Woman B: See how pretty our brigade leader is today!

(*The neighbours join in teasing her.*)

Wang (*awkwardly*): Help yourselves to cigarettes, everyone.

(*Wang Chih-hua and Tung Hui-fen enter.*)

Chih-hua (*warmly*): Glad to see you back, elder brother.

Wang: Well, here I am. I hear you're vice-chairman now.

Chih-hua: Just doing my best. But (*pointing to Li*) I depend on Uncle Li here to tell us what to do.

Li: Don't pay any attention to things like that. He's doing very well in his own right.

Fen: Brother-in-law, do you remember me?

Wang (*surprised*): Why, Hui-fen! How you've grown!

Yun: She's married, you can see! Don't you think they make a handsome pair!

Wang: Fancy you two married! I thought you got up to secondary school, Hui-fen.

Yun: Yes, she did, and passed out well. She's a teacher now.

Li: And she's also the co-op book-keeper.

Wang: You can do accounts! Why ever don't you go and get a job in the city then?

Li: When she's just married? Can she bear to be parted from her loved one?

Fen (*indignantly*): Uncle! D'you honestly think I stay here just to be with him?

Neighbour Woman C: Really, Comrade Chairman, d'you think that's the way to look at our Hui-fen?

Neighbour Woman B: What a way to think!

Neighbour Woman D: Showing your disrespect for women like that!

Neighbour Woman E (*chaffingly*): We shan't let him get away with it.

Li: My mistake, I take it all back! I wasn't thinking what I said.

(*There is a general burst of laughter.*)

Li *(to Wang)*: Seriously, she's quite indispensable here.

(Wang looks at Chih-hua and then at Hui-fen but says nothing.)

Fen: You have a look at this, brother-in-law. *(Brings out the exercise book.)*

Wang: Whose is that?

Fen: My sister's. Just see how well she's got on with her literacy studies.

Chih-hua: She's made tremendous progress these last four years.

Yun: Hui-fen, are you crazy! D'you mean you've got one of my books there? *(Snatches it away.)*

Chih-hua: There's nothing to be shy about there, sister-in-law.

(The neighbours nudge one another meaningly. There are chuckles and encouraging nods, as they make it quite clear that they are teasing the newly united husband and wife.)

Wang: Won't anyone smoke?

Li: Here, we must be serious. Wang Piao, there's a general membership meeting tonight. Can you come and say a few words? We'd like your opinion on our long-term plan.

Chih-hua: Oh yes! This time you must stay here for a good long spell. You'll be able to give us a lot of help.

Neighbour A: Can you give us a report on current affairs tonight?

Neighbour Woman B: I think it's more important for him to talk about the farm work.

(They break into general discussion on whether the report is to be on current affairs or farming. Granny Wang comes in.)

Li: He'll talk on both. I expect he'll speak on any subject you ask for.

Wang: Yes, of course. I'll come along and say a few words. It may be a department store that I'm vice-

manager of, but I flatter myself I know something of farming co-ops, too.

Li: Good, good. Look, everyone, we must be a nuisance here. Don't you think we'd better go, and give them a chance to talk?

(There is general agreement, and they all go, with a friendly "Have a good rest," and so on to Wang Piao.)

Wang *(half-rising)*: Goodbye! *(There is only the family on stage now. Wang yawns with ill-concealed distaste.)* What a bother they are!

Granny: How can you say that! They came out of pure neighbourliness.

Yun: Don't you want something to eat?

(Wang nods.)

Hsiao-tsui: Mummy, I'm hungry.

(Granny Wang and Hui-yun go into the inner room and fetch out bowls of food which they place on the table. They all sit down to eat.)

Granny: We killed a fowl, but you didn't give us time to cook it. Ai, at long last you're back! All these years, Hui-yun and I have been thinking and talking about you day and night. But you? I wonder if you ever thought of us. . . .

Yun *(in a low voice)*: Is there anything special you want to eat? We'll get it for you in the market.

Wang: No, don't bother about it.

Granny: There've been so many changes here in the village in the last few years. The yield's increasing every year in the co-op. Did you notice the way this house has been done up? We've bought some new things, too. Even your old mother owns a new suit of padded clothes nowadays.

Hsiao-tsui *(finishing her bowl of food)*: It's time for school.

Granny: Yes, dear, run along. Be careful and don't go falling over on the way.

Hsiao-tsui: I'll be careful, granny. Goodbye!

Yun: Manners, dear! Say goodbye to daddy properly!

Hsiao-tsui (*salutes him*): 'Bye, daddy! (*Runs off.*)

Granny: Look at her, Piao, isn't she a nice child? She's just like her mother, isn't she?

Yun: Oh mother, don't go praising her too much.

Granny (*to Wang Piao*): You can put your whole heart into your work, and not worry about us. The Communist Party has made you what you are; you must be worthy of the Party. (*Pause.*) But, you know, you should find time to write more letters and come home more often. You and Hui-yun are both still young.

(*Wang does not answer, but pushes away his bowl.*)

Granny: When the busy season's over here you should take your family to the city for a long stay. I'm too old for it now; I don't want to go.

Yun (*with a glance at Wang Piao*): Mother, how can we leave you at home all by yourself?

Granny: I'm not too old to look after myself. As long as you are happy, and better still, if I have a grandson, that'll be better for me than the finest life and food. (*To her son.*) I don't want to blame you, son, but you haven't been back for four years and you write so seldom. You mustn't do that again. (*Gets up and goes to the door.*) I must go to the vegetable patch. (*Exit.*)

Yun (*rather awkwardly*): Will you have a bit more rice?

Wang: No, thank you. (*Silence.*)

Yun (*with bent head*): It's exactly four years since you were here.

Wang: Um! (*Seems deep in thought.*)

Yun: Your mother missed you very much.

Wang: Um!

Yun: Hsiao-tsui and I also missed you terribly. . . .

(*Wang gets up and begins to pace to and fro uneasily.*)

Yun (*suddenly feeling like a young girl again*): At last we've got you back with us again.

Wang (*with a sneer*): Yes, indeed!

Yun: Do you remember, promising me, before you left, that you'd be back once a year?

Wang: I've been kept busy with my work.

Yun: I know. At times I wanted to come to you, but you asked me not to and I didn't like to leave your mother on her own. Besides, we had too much work, too. I couldn't just drop it. That's why I never came. (*Charmingly shy.*) You know, all this time I've been snatching time to study. It's essential to have a bit of education if we want to live properly in a socialist society. I tried very hard, you know, so as not to lag too far behind you. All the letters we sent you this year were written by me. What did you think of my writing?

Wang (*perfunctorily*): It was very good.

Yun: You mustn't laugh at me. There was so much that I wanted to write and tell you but I couldn't put it down on paper. You were there all alone, with no one to take care of you, or to do your washing and mending. I felt very sad about it. What was it like? How did you manage?

Wang: Fairly well.

Yun: How long are you going to stay this time?

Wang (*showing impatience*): I haven't made up my mind yet.

Yun (*sees he is getting cross*): Aren't you feeling all right? Come in and lie down a bit. (*Laughs.*) I've been so busy telling you about things that I forgot you've only just come off the train. (*In a low voice.*) When I heard you were coming, my heart got into such a flutter. Everyone was so glad for my sake! Uncle Li positively forbade me to go to work, but I can tell you, I was quite in a daze.

Wang (*as if he has finally made up his mind*): Hui-yun, sit down, will you? I've got something to say to you.

Yun (*pleased*): Are you sure you don't want to rest a bit first?

Wang (*takes no notice of her reaction*): Tell me what you think of our marriage. Are you content with the way things are? I don't suppose you understand what I'm getting at. I mean. . . .

Yun: Please don't think I'm still what I used to be. Of course I understand.

Wang: Well then, what do you think?

Yun: I'm quite happy. At first, when you wrote so seldom, I was a little worried, and talked it over with my sister. She told me not to be silly, and said that when there is love between husband and wife differences in education don't matter very much. After all, you know, Hui-fen herself married Chih-hua. I knew, too, that because you are a Communist you couldn't possibly think me below you, and reminded myself how happy we were. What's more, there's our child. And I was right, you see! You've come back.

Wang (*under his breath*): Yes, I've come back.

Yun (*no longer shy*): You rest now. Have a little nap. I'll go and cook the chicken. You don't have to worry about us. I find life quite good and I do my work well. This year we're going to get a thousand catties per *mou*.

Wang: Stop! *I* don't find life so pleasant.

Yun (*smiling*): What's the matter with your life? I'll come to the city, if you like, and look after you. Will that make it better? Only I'll have to come back to the village during the busy seasons.

Wang (*coldly*): That's not what I want at all, Hui-yun, and I can't come home from one year to another. It's not fair to you.

Yun: It's all right now; I'm used to it. In future, if you come back once a year I'll be happy enough.

Wang: Suppose I don't come back in five years even?

Yun: I'll wait for you.

Wang: And if I never come back?

Yun: Don't be foolish! Who ever heard of a man never coming home?

Wang: But if it should happen?

Yun: Then I'll come to look for you.

Wang: Um! (*His face wreathed in smiles.*) So you really love me, Hui-yun?

Yun (*with her hand on her heart*): Till death. When you came home four years ago, didn't I make that clear to you?

Wang: Good. Now I want you to help me with a difficult problem. I'm sure you won't refuse.

Yun (*smiling*): Look at you! You want to test me as soon as you're back. All right, I won't refuse.

Wang: Would you agree to anything?

Yun: I'm sure you won't ask me to do anything wrong.

Wang (*with would-be love, but with insincerity showing in his voice*): I must tell you, Hui-yun, that despite my high salary and position in the city, I don't lead a happy life.

Yun: Why not?

Wang: I need someone to understand me and my work. Otherwise, after office hours I feel like a monk.

Yun: D'you want me to come?

Wang: No. You'd be no use. Hui-yun, if you love me, can you relieve me of this suffering? Will you help me loosen the ropes that bind me?

Yun (*puzzled and worried*): But if you don't want me to come, how can I help you?

Wang: It must be hard for you too, here at home by yourself. It's hard on both of us.

Yun: I don't feel it's too bad. I can manage.

Wang: But it isn't good for you. Hui-yun, I have been thinking about you a lot. You haven't got a husband, really. I don't know how you've endured a life like that. At the same time it's not possible for me to come back often. I can't bear to see you wasting your youth like this. The best things in life, Hui-yun, are youth and love. Neither you nor I can do without them. Though I'm no longer so young, I still wish to enjoy a bit of love.

Yun: I wish you'll speak the way we speak here. I just don't understand what you're trying to say.

Wang: Don't pretend you don't understand, Hui-yun! We are both of us wasting the best years of our lives. We live far apart, but you're like a heavy rope tying me up. I want to soar high up into the clouds but I can't; I want happiness, but it eludes me. I want something I've been thirsting for, but I can't get it.

Yun (*with simplicity*): I still don't understand. Can't you take me with you when you soar into the clouds? I'll be able to follow you. (*Gently.*) You're a Communist. I know you can help me.

Wang (*looks first at her and then down at himself*): It's very difficult. There's too big a difference between us. You won't be able to soar.

Yun (*shuddering*): What do you wish me to do then?

Wang: You've always been a sensible person. (*Taking her hand.*) Hui-yun, listen to me, help me.

Yun: I don't understand.

Wang: I want you to agree to what I say. (*Producing a piece of paper.*) Will you sign this?

Yun (*with dread*): What is it?

Wang: You can read it yourself. I thought you'd been learning to read and write.

Yun (*trembling*): An application for divorce!

Wang (*extremely affectionate*): I know it will upset you. But what else can we do? We have taken different roads in life; we can only part. Hui-yun,

I'm considering it from your point of view. I hope you'll consider mine too. Ask yourself for a moment how a person like me can get along without an educated and good-looking helpmate? You may be worrying about old conventions, and want to keep up appearances, but you shouldn't mind about such things. They're not important. You can still find happiness; you are not really too old yet. . . .

Yun: Please don't test me any more, my darling. Your way of testing is too cruel. . . .

Wang: If you really don't want anyone to know we can have a divorce secretly. The land and house will be yours. And if you have no wish to remarry, I can still come back here once a year.

Yun: What on earth are you saying?

Wang: Think for a minute. I'm a big shot, a manager, but you're just a peasant woman. . . .

Yun: According to you, you too used to be a. . . .

Wang (*sharply*): I've said all there is to say. If you won't agree, then don't be surprised if I take measures from my side. It's clear, anyway, that we're not suited to one another.

Yun: Not suited to one another?

Wang: Look at the way you dress, for one thing!

Yun: The way I dress?

Wang: I want to do my work well, but as soon as I remember I have a wife like you I can't work in peace. I've been struggling with it for four years now, and looking round. Everything's settled now. If you continue to be obstinate, you'll not only harm my work, but prevent yet another person from being happy. I hope you won't be so selfish or have so little heart!

Yun (*bewildered*): Are you serious? No, no, you are making a joke. I remember you used to like to frighten me, and then come and console me.

Wang (*harshly*): I'm quite serious, I assure you! You must be sensible. It's true I used to love you, but

times have changed and the situation is different. (*Softening again.*) Hui-yun, please don't hold me back. Come, sign the paper. . . .

(*Yun bursts into tears.*)

Wang: I haven't been back for four years in the hope that you'd lose heart and give me up. . . . But now I can't keep silent any longer. To be quite frank, I've found the woman I really want.

Yun: Oh! You can't do this. D'you mean you'd make our Hsiao-tsui fatherless? I know I'm not good enough for you, but you must give me time to catch up.

Wang: You can't expect me to ruin my whole plan of life for you.

Yun (*gets up and runs over to Wang*): You can't do this. It is not right! It's wrong for you, for me and for our child.

Wang (*pushes her aside*): Don't hang on to me like that. To tell you the truth, there is no longer any love between us.

Yun (*stands like a stone*): No love between us!

Wang (*showing his true face*): Let's come to the point. Will you agree? (*There is a pause.*)

Wang: If you won't it'll have to be settled in court. (*Pretends to be gentle again.*) However, I don't think you are the kind to be unkind and make trouble. I know you love Hsiao-tsui, and I'll let you have her, and give you an allowance. (*He fishes out some money.*) Here you are . . . here's forty yuan. Take it. We'll settle this peacefully.

Yun: You. . . .

Wang: Come on, take it. Let's part friends; it's much better than going to court. Once there, the judge will listen to me and not to you. Let me tell you I've come back solely to do this. Don't fool yourself you can make me change my mind.

Yun: Ah!

Wang (*threateningly*): If we settle this peacefully, I'll agree to some of your terms. Otherwise don't blame me if I forget we were once husband and wife. Take the money now and we can get down to business.

(*Yun can find no words, but stares at him, unable to believe what she hears.*)

Wang: Why d'you stare at me like that? We'll discuss the terms today and get the divorce papers done tomorrow. Here's the money. Is it enough? (*Callously.*) Go on, for goodness' sake . . . take it.

Yun (*suddenly slaps the money out of Wang's hand*): Do you think my heart can be bought?

Wang: Idiot!

Yun: For years I waited for you. I kept the memory of you in my heart like a sacred ideal. When we were in want here I kept it from you, so that you wouldn't worry and spoil your work. Now you ask *me* to consider you, but have you considered what it means for Hsiao-tsui and me? . . . (*Covers her face with her hands.*)

Wang: Don't be a vixen. I don't care what you feel like; I'm going to divorce you. A peasant woman like you to have the nerve to try to keep me for a husband! Let me tell you: there's nothing doing! You might as well open your eyes and be sensible.

Hsiao-tsui (*coming in with her satchel*): Mummy, there's no class this afternoon, so auntie (*correcting herself*), I mean teacher, told me I could come home. (*To Wang, affectionately.*) Hello, daddy!

Wang: Go away.

Yun (*throwing her arms round Hsiao-tsui*): Oh Hsiao-tsui, you haven't got a daddy any more.

Wang (*viciously*): Are you going to agree or not? Unless you do, I shan't even let you keep Hsiao-tsui.

(*Yun holds Hsiao-tsui tightly but says nothing. Hsiao-tsui senses that something is wrong and gasps, "Mummy!"*)

Yun: It's all right, darling, you've got your mummy.
Hsiao-tsui: Daddy, you shouldn't upset mummy like this.
Wang: You get out of here!
Hsiao-tsui (*frightened, begins to cry*): Mummy, daddy's being nasty to me.
Yun: How can you treat the child like that! Now I can really see what you're like.
Wang: So much the better. Perhaps you'll agree to divorce me now. All I want is to get away from you as quick as I can.
Hsiao-tsui: Please, mummy and daddy, don't quarrel any more, please. It's horrid! Can't you be friends?
Yun: This man isn't your daddy any more.
Hsiao-tsui: He *is* my daddy!
Yun: Your father is dead.
Hsiao-tsui (*sobbing*): Oh no! I want my daddy. (*Runs over to Wang.*) Daddy, please make it up with mum. Look, she's crying! I want to cry too.
Wang (*realizing that things are not going the way he wishes, loses his temper*): Get off! (*Pushes Hsiao-tsui, who falls down. Granny Wang comes in with vegetables.*)
Granny (*to Yun*): Have you got the chicken on yet? (*Sees that something has gone very wrong.*) Why, what ever's the matter?
Yun (*her bitterness erupting*): Oh, mother! (*Flings herself sobbing into Granny Wang's arms.*)
Granny (*to Wang Piao, severely*): What's come over you? Hasn't she had enough to bear at home, without you coming back to make it worse?
Wang: I tried to talk to her reasonably, but she wouldn't listen to me.
Granny (*to Yun*): What is the matter, my child?
Wang (*trying to get the upper hand*): You see, mother, I've been thinking of taking you back to the city with me.
Granny: Me? Better think about Hsiao-tsui and her mother.

Wang: I can't take her. There's no love between us and she'd be no help. I want to divorce her.
Granny: My son!
Hsiao-tsui (*comprehending now*): Oh granny, he doesn't want mummy any more!
Wang (*to his mother*): Mother, this is something that can't be helped.
Granny: You scoundrel! We were longing and longing for your return, and this is what you have to say when you are back!
Wang: Don't scold, mother. I'll take you back to the city where you can have a good life.
Granny: Devil take the city! Why should I want to go there? You must take back what you've just said.
Wang (*decisively*): Never!
Granny (*trembling with rage*): Do you want to kill her? Do you want to drive me to an early grave?
Wang: Why take it like this, mother? You've got a son to take care of you.
Granny: A son! Are you the child that I gave suck to? (*Looks at Hsiao-tsui and Hui-yun and beginning to weep.*) You can't do this. You weren't forced into marriage. You loved each other. What's this sham now?
Wang: That was before. Now things are different.
Granny (*sharply*): I suppose you think that because you're a government official she's no longer good enough for you!
Wang: Please don't interfere in things that don't concern you, mother. This is our affair.
Granny: I will interfere. I must! Oh, what ingratitude! You, who once wept, and pleaded with me to agree to your marrying her! You who dogged her doorstep day after day! Now that you're doing well, you want to discard her! You don't even want your own child or your old mother.

Wang (*his anger rising*): Mother, I've done nothing to offend you. You can come back with me and I shall look after you. But to expect me to give up the divorce is out of the question. (*Pause.*) Mother, please don't be foolish. Do you want to lose your son? You will, if you take your daughter-in-law's side.

Granny (*shaking*): You!

Hsiao-tsui (*running up to Wang*): Daddy!

Wang (*ignoring the child. To Yun*): Are you going to agree to it or not? I want an answer now.

Yun (*getting to her feet abruptly*): I agree.

Granny: Don't say it, my child, don't say it! You're not to agree to it!

Hsiao-tsui: Mummy!

Yun: Mother, you see how it is. He keeps on saying I'm not good enough for him. Why should I cling to him? Wang Piao, give me that paper.

Wang (*overjoyed*): My good Hui-yun! I knew you'd understand me. Good girl, I'll never forget you. (*Flattens out the divorce paper on the table.*)

Yun (*coldly*): I should have thought I was not good enough for you to remember. (*She sits down, her hands trembling. Wang Piao hands her a pen.*)

Granny (*trying to stop her*): Wait, Hui-yun, wait! Don't let that wretch get away with it so easily.

Wang (*holds back Granny Wang from going to Hui-yun, and pushes her away*): This is nothing to do with you, mother.

(*Granny Wang totters and falls, though Wang Piao had not pushed her hard. She is speechless with anger.*)

Yun (*signs the document*): There you are. Take it! (*Helps Granny Wang to her feet.*) Mother!

Wang (*looks at the document, and, trying to hide his joy, puts it in his pocket*): Let me help you up, mother. If she agrees to a divorce, I'll agree to any terms. You must come to my wedding next month.

Your new daughter-in-law is an educated girl. She can write and paint. She's only twenty-one.

Granny (*boxes Wang Piao's ears*): Get out of here, you! This is no longer any home of yours!

Wang: There, there, mother, don't be angry. Everything's settled now. We'll go back to the city together tomorrow.

(*Tung Hui-fen comes in, a covered bowl in her hand.*)

Granny: Settled! What do you mean? I've every intention of asking your superiors what they mean by educating you to be like this.

Wang: Come now, mother, don't take it like that. After all, I *am* your son, aren't I?

Granny: You are no son of mine, now. (*Goes to the door.*)

Fen (*comes forward with the bowl*): We haven't got anything good to offer you, brother-in-law, but we wondered if you would like a bit of goose. . . .

Granny (*snatches the dish from her*): Don't give him anything! Our food's too good for him.

Fen (*notices something is the matter*): What's happened? What's up?

Wang (*feeling awkward*): It's nothing. Do sit down, won't you?

Hsiao-tsui: My daddy's divorcing mummy.

Fen (*shocked*): What? Divorcing her?

(*Granny Wang slips out.*)

Yun (*with a sad smile*): Don't ask me questions now, sister. I'll be able to go on living.

Fen: Comrade Wang Piao, what reason have you to ask for a divorce?

Wang: There's no love between us, we. . . .

Fen: Whatever kind of a reason d'you call that? You have loved, and you have a child.

Wang: I thank you for your concern, Comrade Teacher, but this happens to be my private affair.

Fen: What do you mean, private! I dare say you'd like to keep this all private, but you can't when you're such a blackguard as to throw away your old wife for a new one.

Wang (*enraged*): Who gives you the right to abuse me like this!

Fen (*also angry now*): Society gives me the right! I can't believe it. A Communist! No, you're not worthy to be called a Communist.

Wang: Shut up!

Fen: Don't agree to the divorce, sister. I'll write to his superiors at work.

Yun (*softly*): No, Fen! Even if he no longer wished for a divorce I couldn't go on living with him now. Today has opened my eyes to many things. The love between you and your husband is real, but I—I've only been a stepping-stone for a thoroughly selfish person. For nearly ten years I've been that! And now that he's climbed up high he kicks me away.

Hsiao-tsui: Mummy, this is our home. Tell him to go away.

Yun (*to Wang*): We were once husband and wife, so I have a duty to you. I must warn you that you should be aware of what will happen to you if you go on like this. I may not be well-educated, nor have I seen much of the world, but I do know that a person like the heartless Chen Shih-mei, who married the emperor's daughter and then tossed off his old wife and children, has no place in our new society. I used to tell myself you were there in the city serving the people with your whole heart and soul, but I know better now.

Wang (*doing his best to regain his dignity*): You know better! What's your great knowledge? It's a fact; I want a divorce and I want to marry someone else. How does that affect my work? Does that make me a bad official?

Yun (*loudly*): Don't fool yourself. He who is thoroughly unscrupulous and bad in one respect will never be really good in others. I can see it all quite clearly. You're a cheat and a liar, and cheats and liars cannot hide themselves for ever.

Wang: You be quiet! You can gabble as much as you like, but I don't want you.

Yun (*smiling scornfully*): Do you imagine I'm trying to hold you? Do you think—(*Shaking her head.*) Ah! Why should I try to explain anything to you! Hui-fen, I'll be able to live on my own quite well. Don't worry about that.

(*Granny Wang comes back with Li Teh-yu and Wang Chih-hua. Hui-yun goes out.*)

Li: My boy, what makes you begin to quarrel as soon as you get home? Tell me, in what way has Hui-yun failed in her duties? Tell me, and I'll try to help her.

Wang: There's nothing to tell you. Won't you sit down?

Granny (*to Fen*): He's had a change of heart. He's found a twenty-one-year-old, who writes and paints.

Wang (*trying to carry it off*): Have a cigarette, uncle.

(*Chih-hua starts to speak, but Wang interrupts, and behaves as though nothing has happened.*)

Wang: Now about that report you people want me to give you. I think I'll. . . .

Chih-hua (*cutting him short*): Elder brother, I'm an outspoken and straightforward person, and I must tell you that what you want to do not only breaks up your home but makes us, your neighbours, angry. You know how highly we here think of you.

Li: Chih-hua is right. You cannot let yourself do such things as will make our people point at you in scorn and mutter against you all your life.

Fen: It is such a thing he's already done.

(*The neighbours come in in ones and twos.*)

Wang: It seems to me that you people still indulge in feudal ideas, uncle. Haven't you learned about the Marriage Law?

Fen (*indignantly*): Our Marriage Law was not made to be used by scoundrels. It's not an excuse for trifling with women.

Wang (*angrily*): Are you trying to insult me? Really, this is too much.

Li (*seriously*): Comrade Wang Piao, this is no time to lose your temper. Why don't you tell us everything, and let the people say who is in the right.

Wang: This is my private affair. I have no desire to ask other people to trouble their heads over it.

Li: You've misunderstood me. I don't want to interfere in your getting a divorce. If the divorce is for good reasons, and not done in an underhand way no one has any right to interfere. I am speaking to you as one Communist to another. What is the reason for your divorce? Why do you want it? Have you considered the consequences carefully?

Wang: I have the right to decide my own private life.

Fen: Have you? That depends on what you do with it. If a Party member, in his private life, degrades the moral principles of communism, and it affects the prestige of the Party, then not only the Party organization, but the masses, too, have the right to interfere.

Wang: I'll trouble you to make yourself clear, if you please. In what way do you claim that I have degraded communist morality?

Chih-hua: Let me ask a question. What has Sister Yun done that is not worthy of you? In what way is she not good enough for you, that you want to divorce her?

Wang: There's no love between us.

One of the Neighbours: Pah! There speaks a heartless beast! Ten years ago, who was it who begged of me to be the matchmaker between you and her?

Who was it, when her father was against the match, who asked me to help you elope with her!

Li: It's no good trying to hide a corpse in melting snow, comrade. Do you think we are fools, because we're peasants? Admit it frankly. What you want is just selfish pleasure. Let me tell you, comrade, this is very serious. It's a nasty bourgeois idea, the kind exploiting classes have.

Chih-hua: Because your lusts make you desire a prettier and younger woman, you are willing to desert your wife, your child and even your mother. Is that the behaviour of a Communist?

Wang: Rubbish! The reason I want a divorce is just as much to help me do my work properly.

Li: Work properly? You make me blush for you! How can you use such words?

Wang: I refuse to discuss this with you. You don't understand a thing. At all events I don't love Tung Hui-yun, and I see no call to sacrifice myself for her. I'm quite prepared to defend my right to my own life, but it's just as much for her benefit too.

Yun (*coming in from the inner room*): I'll thank you, not to drag me in again. You are not good enough to mention my name! Will you please go! (*To herself.*) I can see everything clearly now. Ah me! It's not a simple thing to know what a person's really like. The Wang Piao of today's no longer the Wang Piao I knew ten years ago. It is difficult to believe that the person I shared bitterness and hardship with, the person who used to walk hand in hand with me, and talk with me as from heart to heart is now the person who can tell me there is no love between us. He used to be as ignorant and illiterate as I! And now that the Party has educated him and brought him on, he tells me my educational level is too low for his great height! To think that someone who so short a time back had climbed out of the mud should now turn round to say I'm too

much of a country wench for him! A man who can treat his own mother, his own child, once so dear to his heart, as enemies. Ah . . . the road he has taken is a very different road from ours. When he says no love, or no education, he's just mouthing words to try and fool us. All he really wants is youth, beauty and lust. He wants to snatch happiness for himself at the cost of heart-break and agony for others. . . . He fooled me before: now he is fooling another woman, and before he's finished he'll fool many more. His type is never satisfied. He'll stop at nothing. (*To Wang.*) Wang Piao, I have to give you warning once more. I'll divorce you without regret. I have strong hands and I know how to use them. I know what life is, and how to live it. The Party will go on guiding me, and my co-op comrades will help me. I shall be able to stand on my own feet. Indeed, I shall be better off separated from you, Wang Piao. My only regret is that after all the Party and the people have done for you you can only use the abilities they fostered to further your own selfish gains. You misuse them to lord it over others. Despite the swamps you are sinking in you still dare to hold your head up and strut about arrogantly. If you continue in such blindness you'll be sorry one day, but it'll be too late.

Granny: Say no more, Hui-yun. This brute has brought shame down on me in my old age.

Neighbour A: Why waste your breath on such as him, Hui-yun?

Neighbour B: Don't worry, Hui-yun. We will be with you.

Neighbour C: Try not to feel sad, Hui-yun. We shall all stand behind you.

Yun: Thank you, my friends. You help me to realize I am not alone. You need not worry for me. I shall not let my life be ruined by a worthless, selfish person.

Hsiao-tsui (*rushing to Yun*): Oh mummy, mummy, please don't get a divorce! They'll say I have no daddy! (*Sobbing bitterly, she runs to Wang Piao.*) Daddy, daddy, why don't you love me?

Yun: Come to your mother, Hsiao-tsui. She loves you, and all your neighbours love you.

Li: Come to us, Hsiao-tsui. You have a whole large family in the co-op to love you.

Neighbour A: Look at the poor child! She's crying fit to break her little heart! (*Pointing to Wang.*) But him! His heart's a stone. His feelings aren't even touched.

Granny (*to Wang*): My son, open your eyes! Try to see things as they really are. You have a devoted, faithful wife. She is as well capable and intelligent. How can you think she's not good enough for you? You should be thankful she did not find you not good enough for her! Yet you dare to turn round and say she's not good enough for you! You're going a little mad, my son. Turn back! Turn back! Give me that divorce paper.

Wang: That's impossible. I'll not sacrifice my happiness for you. . . .

(*Granny Wang stares at her son in helpless dejection.*)

Yun: Don't worry, mother, I'll never leave you, as long as there's breath in me.

Li: So, Vice-Manager Wang! It seems you have no ears for what we have to say. But I'll not allow a person like you, a person with only selfish aims, to stay in our revolutionary ranks and make trouble. I shall go to the city, and talk to the comrades who direct your work.

Chih-hua: No, Comrade Chairman. You stay here and look after farm work. I'll go and see to that.

Fen: I agree with you. We'll go to the city together, and take Hsiao-tsui. I want to see the girl he wants to marry, this clever one who can write and paint.

Wang (*startled*): What are you getting at?

Fen: I want her to see your daughter, the daughter of the great vice-manager! I shall ask her why she wants to marry a man who's already married, with a child.

Neighbour A: That's right, Teacher Tung. I'll come out and help you get the cart ready. (*Exit.*)

Wang (*pleadingly*): Hui-fen, you mustn't do that. Some of the others may not be able to understand me, but surely, you can sympathize with me.

Fen: Sympathize with you! I've no sympathy for you! I think you must have deceived this other girl and I want to show her your true face. I want to see that your selfish plans don't go through.

Chih-hua: Ah, don't waste words on him. Come on. See you in the city, vice-manager.
(*Fen, Chih-hua and Hsiao-tsui exeunt.*)

Wang (*in a panic*): What are you doing? What is this? (*Pleading.*) Uncle, you can't let them do this.

Li (*turning away*): I feel no call to stop them.

Wang (*in despair*): Oh God, this will be the finish of me. (*Snatches up his brief-case and runs out.*)

Granny (*weeping*): What sort of a son did I give birth to!

Li: Don't break your heart over him, sister. Hui-yun understands and is right. He's not worthy to be your son, or her husband.

Curtain

Translated by Tang Sheng

POSTSCRIPT

These four one-act plays have been chosen from plays which have won popularity among the Chinese audience since 1954. They are all by young and little-known writers who have just begun their literary life. The content is new and reflects the contradictions which new events bring during the period of socialist construction in China.

In China's countryside not only has feudal land ownership changed into land owned by the tillers, but individual ownership has advanced to co-operative, collective ownership. But there still remains much to be done to eradicate the hang-overs of the old days. Though the peasants have come to realize the advantages of co-operation, and large numbers of very active elements have appeared among them, there are still some who think first of their own interests. "Two Ways of Looking at It" tells how a peasant woman, Pien Erh-sao, judges Uncle Jen from her own selfish point of view. This mentality has to be criticized if the cause of socialism is to be advanced among the peasants.

The conflict between the old and new is intense in all human relationships including, of course, marriage. In "Home-Coming" we see a Party member, who has gone through much hardship during the revolution, trying to desert his peasant wife when he has found a new love in the city, and generally behaving as members of the exploiting class did in the past, not caring for the sufferings of others so long as he himself enjoys the comforts of life. He has to be taught a lesson. But his wife, Tung Hui-yun, a peasant woman who has become economically independent after

liberation, is able to overcome her personal difficulties and is no longer a helpless victim of society, as she would have been in the old days. Despite the blow she suffers at her husband's hands, she does not lose her faith in life. She has behind her the support of the Party and the people, while her husband finds himself spurned by the new society.

The Chinese people rejoice in their new government, the first that really places itself in the service of the people. But there are still some individuals, even in positions of responsibility, who still like to bully those beneath them and flatter those above. Liu Shan-chi in "The Day the New Director Came" is such a one. But nowadays such people cannot get away with it. They are exposed, ridiculed and made to see what is right.

Our socialist emulation campaigns are launched to mobilize the advanced workers to bring on the backward ones. Not everything goes smoothly, however, and difficulties often crop up, as we may see in "Saturday Afternoon at the Mill." There is no doubt about the enthusiasm and devotion of the team leader in this play, but he has unknowingly a desire for personal praise, and forgets that the needs of other teams are just as important for production as his own — another aspect of the many contradictions which arise between old and new ideas. Even in this comparatively brief period, the Chinese people have done much to wipe out the bad old influences. The successful struggle for betterment, material as well as moral, goes on in all phases of life.

This is the second collection of one-act plays we have translated into English. The first, *The Women's Representative,* also gave a glimpse of the Chinese people's new life after liberation and the completion of the land reform, but it dealt with the problems mainly from the angle of the emancipation of women, their rights to equality and freedom of marriage. This collection, "Saturday Afternoon at the Mill," deals with other conflicts, in particular the struggle between the new morality of working for the interest of the collective whole and the old, backward ideas of individualism.

In New China we expose and criticize faults openly and frankly, as we have found this to be the best way to correct them. Our playwrights play their part in this. Their satires uncover and bring all that is negative and backward into the light of day. The themes of the plays and the methods employed all reflect the tremendous strength, and the progress made, in China today.

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